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Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang

THE
FIVE
LEVELS
of
TAIJIQUAN

with commentary by
Master Jan Silberstorff

Translated by Christina Schulz



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Preface to the German Edition

It is my special privilege and joy to heartily recommend this book to you.

Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang's Chinese original text has an enormous depth to it, which is not easily recognized at first sight. It is a wonderful motivational tool for daily practice and for the understanding of Gong Fu in general, and Taijiquan-Gong Fu in particular.

The translation of this article by his master student Jan Silberstorff is a successful transformation of Chinese knowledge into clear and understandable language.

In his commentary Master Jan Silberstorff explains the original text down to the finest detail, so that no questions remain and no uncertainty will hamper your training.

The book has been laid out so that every chapter begins with the Chinese original text and its word-for-word translation. The explanations in the commentary follow. We decided to indent the word-for-word translation by Master Jan Silberstorff and set it below the heading 'Translation'. This simply serves the ease of reading and we hope it will make it easier for you to follow the text and commentary.

I wish you much pleasure in reading. I hope you gain motivation and a deeper understanding of the old art of Taijiquan.

Cordially,

Joachim Stuhlmacher
Publisher of the German Edition

Introduction to the Five Levels of Gong Fu in Taijiquan

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

陈式太极拳的五层功夫

练习太极拳同学生上学是同样道理，从小学到大学，逐步掌握越来越多的知识。没有小学、中学的文化基础，就接受不了大学的课程。学习太极拳也是一层一层由浅入深，循序渐进，如果违背了这个原则，结果是欲速则不达。学习太极拳从开始到成功，可分五个阶段，也称五层功夫。每层功夫都有一定的客观标志，表示功夫的现有水平，第五层功夫为最佳。

现将每一层功夫在练习中达到的标准和技击表现作如下介绍，目的是使广大太极拳爱好者了解自己的现有水平，知道还应进一步学习哪些东西，以利一步一步地进行深造。

TRANSLATION

Learning Taijiquan means to educate oneself. It is like slowly advancing from primary school to university. As time passes, more and more knowledge is gained. Without the foundations of primary school and secondary school, one will not be able to follow the seminars at university. Studying Taijiquan

requires starting from the very bottom, working one's way systematically and step by step towards the more advanced levels. Someone who does not accept this, thinking that he may take a shortcut, will not be successful. The entire process of learning Taijiquan, from the beginning to success, consists of five stages or five levels of martial skills (Gong Fu) built upon each other. Each level of Gong Fu has its own particular and very distinct specifications. The highest goal is achieved with Level 5. In the following five sections every single stage with its own requirements and purposes will be described in detail. This is done with the hope of offering a chance to Taijiquan enthusiasts worldwide to gain a realistic assessment of their own current level. From this point they may then realize what they should learn next and which steps they have to take in order to reach the stages that follow:

COMMENTARY ON ALL FIVE LEVELS

The five levels or stages of development in Taijiquan make up the core of this book, in which Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang attempts to depict the complete development of Taijiquan regardless of style; from the beginner to the highest achievable level. For this purpose he wrote a short introduction, which I want to use to precede this section. Afterwards I will explain some basic things about each level. In the second part I will try to explain each level individually with the help of the original text.

In the introduction to the five levels Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang writes:

Learning Taijiquan means to educate oneself. It is like slowly advancing from primary school to university. As time passes, more and more knowledge is gained. Without the foundations of primary school and secondary school, one will not be able to follow the seminars at university. Studying Taijiquan requires starting from the very bottom, working one's way systematically and step by step towards the more advanced levels. Someone who does not accept this, thinking that he may take a shortcut, will not be successful. The entire process of learning Taijiquan, from the beginning to success, consists of

five stages or five levels of martial skills (Gong Fu) built upon each other. Each level of Gong Fu has its own particular and very distinct specifications. The highest goal is achieved with Level 5. In the following five sections every single stage with its own requirements and purposes will be described in detail. This is done with the hope of offering a chance to Taijiquan enthusiasts worldwide to gain a realistic assessment of their own current level. From this point they may then realize what they should learn next and which steps they have to take in order to reach the stages that follow.

The five levels serve as a guide in two aspects. First they help me assess where I am now and what will follow. Secondly they help in the understanding that learning too fast or skipping something may not be a shortcut. Sometimes it is exactly the opposite, and precisely and slowly examining things turns out to be the fast lane in the end. If the goal is to learn Taijiquan – which uses martial arts as its expression – or even to understand Taiji ('the grand ultimate'), it means that I have to find a way of practising in which I can reach these abilities and realizations by working on myself. It is not about knowing many forms. It is not about demonstrations or the glory of winning tournaments. It really is about understanding this certain essence, making it your own and growing with it. It is important to know that for this purpose one vehicle is enough; one system with corresponding basic exercises, refinements and advanced levels on which to build. This system must be complete within itself and be able to lead to the 'grand ultimate'.

And I have to walk this path with sincerity and care, step by step.

This is one of the meanings of the grandmaster's words:

Studying Taijiquan requires starting from the very bottom, working one's way systematically and step by step towards the more advanced levels. Someone who does not accept this, thinking that he may take a shortcut, will not be successful.

There can be many obstacles – your own impatience; how much time you have available for training; or your curiosity, which wants to jump many miles ahead, and many more.

The latter may not be so problematic, if you go back and carefully relearn the previous steps. You must just understand why this example is used here. Studying at university level requires that you have visited elementary and middle schools. If you go straight to university, you can sit in as a guest, but without having finished elementary and middle school, you do not understand anything. There is no way around the fact that you have to build such things up piece by piece – which is the original, traditional way of thinking. This takes time, and only time yields progress. You will find many obstacles on this path; not only joys, but also difficulties that are to be mastered. This can lead to a certain discontentment, and everyone will have his own version of it.

All this is described in the five levels. It can be pretty accurately predicted when certain difficulties or changes of interest surface.

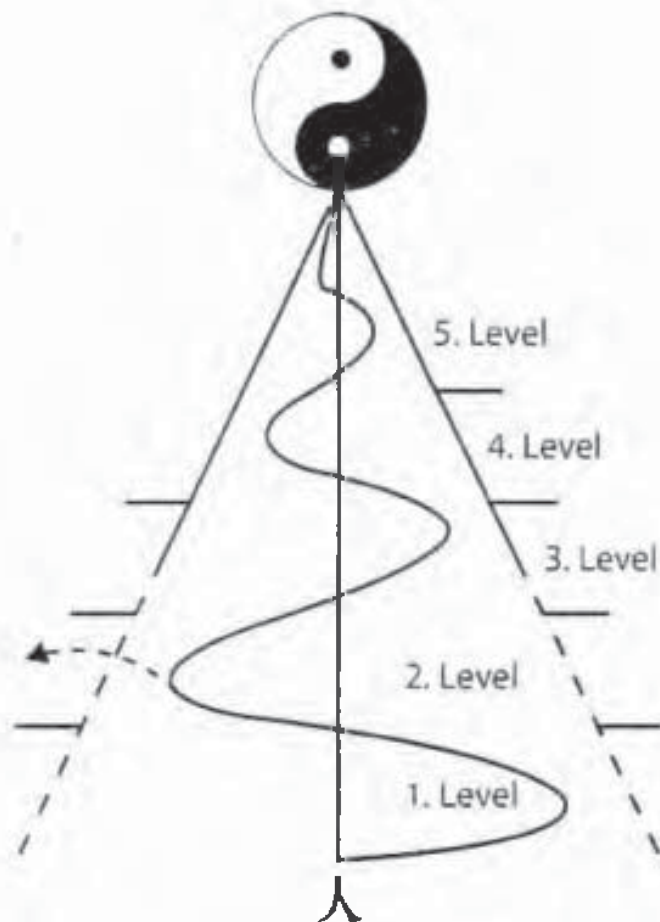
For example, attitudes such as 'Taijiquan isn't as exciting as I thought last year,' 'Taijiquan doesn't seem to be offering more, there is nothing new,' or 'I'm just not making progress – either Taijiquan is no good, or I am too stupid for it' might surface. Such wrong interpretations can usually be predicted and, among other things, I want to clarify them in my commentary. This will make it easier for the student to recognize these difficulties and to master them.

I am going to use the following drawing to illustrate the process of development in Taijiquan. The highest goal which we want to achieve is the perfection of Taiji, the complete state of being, so that perhaps we can even reach Wuji, oneness, the eternal.

At the very top is our goal. Below it we can see the path that leads there, and at the very bottom is the place from where we are starting.

The Chinese character at the base of the drawing means 'human' (ren). That is us, those who have decided to walk this path. Now, the fact is that no one can walk this path in a straight line, because we all make mistakes. Nobody can avoid mistakes.

Therefore, it is not possible to reach the top in a straight line. The path of learning requires of us that we accept deviations and detours to a certain degree. Every student must know that he learns through uncovering his mistakes. In addition, I will first have to find the path.

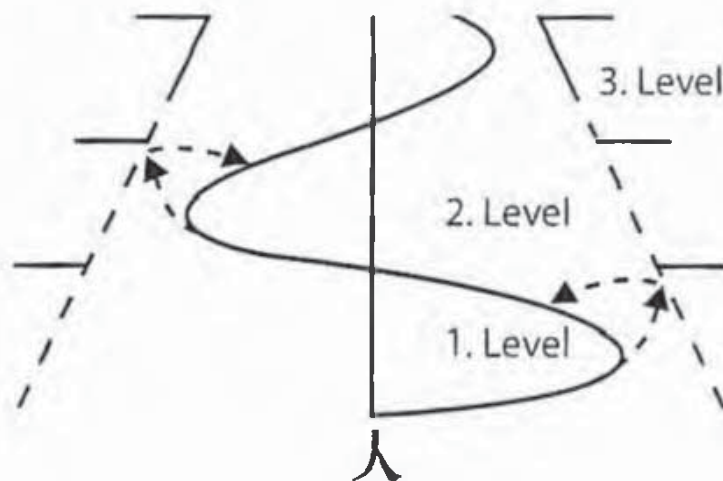


'Wuji' (literally 'without ridge', but interpreted as without limits/without extremities) is represented as an empty circle and symbolizes the origin of being, of Taiji, in its original, undivided unity, the eternal absoluteness, the unchanging.

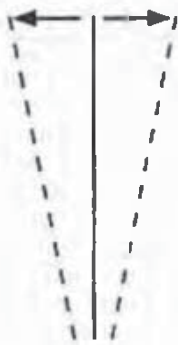
Now, I start learning and here is the path. But I stray from the direct path by misunderstanding the material in different ways. I develop and there is progress, but not without deviations. This means, I need a teacher that can show me my mistakes and correct me, so that I can change direction and find my way back to the path.

If to begin with I moved away from the path in one direction, now I may lose my way in the other direction. Again I will need correction, to return to the correct path, then veer off again, and so on.

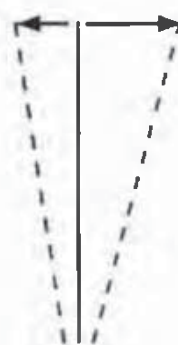
In time the detours get smaller. This process can be explained quite simply by looking at the physical requirements of Taijiquan. For example, when I am practising standing and I lean back too far, I may have the feeling that I am standing straight. From my subjective place of observation, my subjective awareness of my body, I am standing straight. If it didn't feel straight to me, I would position myself differently, because I am looking for the feeling of standing straight. If now the teacher corrects me and actually positions me to stand straight, I may have the feeling that I am leaning forwards, because the other position of leaning too far backwards felt straight.



I trust my teacher, which is of course important while learning. You should look around long enough to find a teacher whom you trust to be competent and who can teach you something. This is the only way to leave behind your own subjectivity and come closer to (relative) objectivity. It makes no sense whatsoever to think you know better than your teacher and go back to your familiar, wrong, because subjective, way of standing after having been corrected. I do not need to waste my time attending lessons with this attitude. This means, we should carefully choose a teacher whom we can trust absolutely.



Let's assume this is a given. I now stand straight, thanks to the correction of my teacher, and it feels to me as though I am leaning too far forwards. I now go home and give it a try, outside of class, during my own training time at home. However, I can't remember the correction perfectly. But I do remember that it felt as though I was leaning too far forwards.



So now I am looking for this 'leaning-too-far-forwards feeling'. And perhaps next time in class I am corrected again, because now I am actually leaning too far forwards. But most likely it is not as far forward as it was too far back at first.

This 'game' continues. Now I again correct myself backwards, perhaps again too far – but again, most likely it is just a little bit less too far back than it previously was too far forwards. Then again my teacher corrects me forwards. And step by step, the deviations level off, until I – for my type and body build – am standing adequately. This is only an example. It can be reflected in completely different interrelationships. However, in practical terms, this is approximately how the training process works.

With the right instruction you will not veer completely off the path, but only in single aspects or areas. The reason why I deviate is because of my subjective, and still somewhat incorrect, interpretation of the taught material. I lean too far forward, then I am corrected, then I lean too far into the other direction. I punch too hard and my teacher tells me to relax; afterwards the punch is too weak. This way, everything gradually balances out.

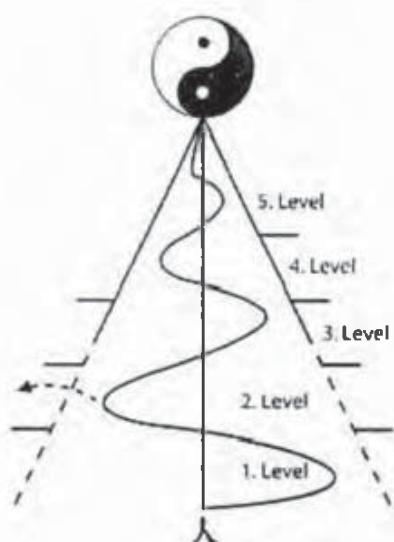
However, there are limits. This is similar to driving on a motorway. The solid line means 'no overtaking'. That means that from Level 4 I can no longer deviate far from the straight path while staying within the limits of this line; at least, not so far as to head off in a wrong direction. So at this level I have learned to correct myself and, so to speak, no longer need a teacher. At the lower levels (1, 2, and 3), however, I have not reached that stage,

because I cannot yet recognize my own mistakes. If, while working within the first three levels in close contact with a teacher, I decide not to attend classes and to practise by myself, it is quite possible that I will diverge further and further from the path. I still make progress in a certain direction, but it no longer has anything to do with Taijiquan in the real sense.

New discoveries such as Taiji-aerobics and others fall within this category. Something does happen, and something is developed, but it does not have anything to do with the real subject matter. And there are reasons for this. I am no longer within the limits of the real path. On the contrary, I deviate from the path, cross a certain limit, and will not be able to find my way back without a teacher. I veer off the path but continue to practise, because I do not notice it.

Perhaps I get the feeling that I no longer need a teacher, because I can do it myself. Everything feels pretty nice, seems to be working a little, and I know that the head should stay erect and not tilt backwards. All this I can do by myself. But I do not recognize my mistakes. That is the beauty of mistakes: If I was aware of them I would not make them. I only do wrong those things of which I am not aware. It makes complete sense that I do not recognize my own mistakes. However, with continued practice the mistakes become more pronounced and I notice subconsciously that somehow things

aren't progressing. Nothing happens. And this is the beginning of wanting to practise something new, to come up with new creations of methods, and to try this or that other thing. This means there is a danger of remaining in a state of half-knowing, and even being tempted to create something new – which can only remain superficial and fail in comparison to the depth of the actual art. This is not to say that you can't have fun with it. However, here we are interested only in



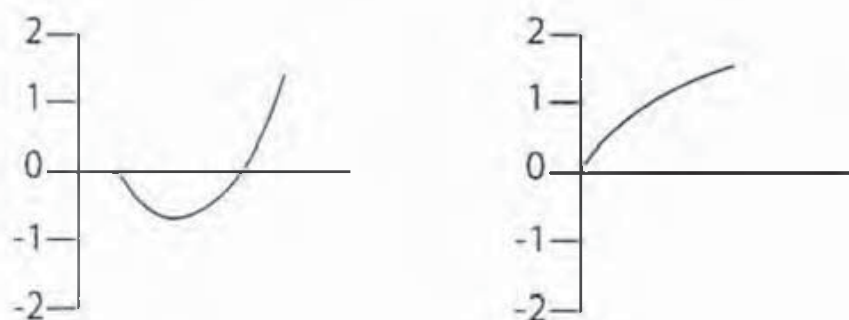
the true, classical art of Taijiquan and not in desperate attempts at failed self-expression.

When the path is followed correctly, it later becomes so rich in content that the interest in combining Taijiquan with other methods fades – because it is complete in itself, and is seen to be so.

Of course there are always people who learn an art to the highest level and then think intelligently about developing it further. We are not talking about these people here, because without them we would not have Taijiquan or other arts; they are essential for the development of every art. However, the group described above endangers such development.

This danger is present up until a certain level of understanding; more precisely, up until Level 4. From Level 4 I have learned and understood so much that I no longer leave the path. I can now correct myself, but will still learn faster with a teacher. It still is easier for me to learn when someone is helping me, but I can find the way to the top by myself; only it takes longer. In Levels 1, 2, and 3 this is not the case. This is because I do not yet know enough, I do not notice enough, and I am not yet familiar enough with certain control mechanisms. This is not because nobody has told me about them, but because I have not yet experienced them for and in myself.

In the beginning it looks like this:



Where there is a plus (+),
there is also a minus (–)

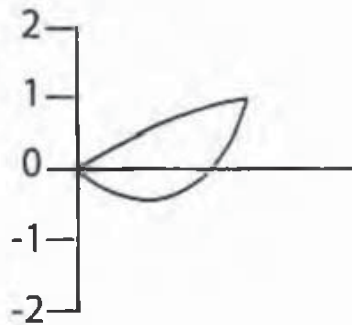
Let's assume I start at zero (0). In the beginning I may move into the negative zone. That may be seen as worsening, and I only begin

to improve later. But this method can have its benefits. I want to get away from certain old concepts and patterns. I should, for example, not use stiff muscular effort, but use my internal energy. At this point I still don't have an understanding of 'internal energy', but am already being asked to give up stiff muscular effort. This means that, where in the past I might have shoved someone away, I now remember not to use muscle power and am left with 'spaghetti arms'. Nothing has yet taken the place of muscle power. I no longer use muscle power, but I do not yet have anything to use in its place. Seen from a martial arts perspective, I have become worse than before, because where I could previously push somebody away, now I no longer do that. However, this is not a negative effect, but what is meant by 'investing in losing'. It is that simple. I give up a certain concept which I no longer want to pursue. But it takes time until I make enough progress with the new concept I want to learn. During this transition period I may temporarily be worse off than I was with my old concept. This, however, is part of the path; or could be at least. It depends on the method of practice, or how I want to get involved with it. There is also the possibility of making progress from the outset, without moving into the negative zone. In this scenario I would stick to my 'crude muscle power' and let go of it bit by bit – that is, whenever I can replace it with my acquired 'internal' ability. Using the first method, you would first learn standing, then Reeling Silk, and only after having attained a strong base would you learn the form. Pushing Hands would be added to the practice only much later, once 'muscle power' had been dissolved and replaced by 'internal energy'. The second method would allow you to learn from the beginning, including Pushing Hands.

With each new insight all learned concepts would be integrated gradually, much like the pieces of a puzzle. 'Muscle power' would slowly yield to 'internal power'. This second method does not enter a negative zone, and therefore it seems that you progress faster in the beginning. But later on the path this student will progress significantly more slowly, because he is still clinging to something

that he should let go of. The first method is exactly opposite: In the beginning you drop back, but later, you progress faster.

Assuming intelligent practice, both methods will meet up again at a certain point on the path.



Level 1 is the level in which I learn all the exercises and movements in their external sequence. First I learn the basic exercises, standing and then Reeling Silk. Afterwards I learn the forms. I learn to flow through them without having to think about the sequence anymore. In addition, I learn basic principles of vertical body alignment, of standing straight. The understanding is not yet refined, but very simple. The spine should be vertical, the weight should sink, the crown of the head should feel as though suspended from above – these are the basic principles that are to be taken into account, and which I should be able to apply within the form in a straightforward way. This is also described as ‘Taijiquan as gentle gymnastics’, ‘Taijiquan for relaxation’, or even ‘stress-free with Taijiquan’. All these aspects fall within Level 1. These concepts do, of course, inevitably indicate that we cannot yet talk of Gong Fu in its real sense.

With Taijiquan the basic assumption is that it is fundamentally a martial art. This means that at Level 1 we cannot yet talk of martial abilities. I have learned the movements in the way someone learns gymnastics, which means as a form of exercise, a sequence of movements. That does not mean that I can already implement the techniques of Pushing Hands partner exercises or the self-defence applications.

'Gong fu' ('hard work') describes a state in which one has achieved a high level of ability through much effort and endurance.

'Tui Shou' ('Pushing Hands') refers to the partner exercises of Taijiquan.

This is because the real work on the essence, the development of Taijiquan power, of the so-called 'internal power', has not yet begun.

The lessons are interesting and exciting, because every time I am told something new. I do not yet know all the wise stories, and again and again you are impressed by the amazing things you get to hear. Also, every time there is a new movement, a new piece of the form. This keeps it interesting and exciting. Every time I go home I can say, 'Look, today I learned "single whip" and next time we will learn "crane spreading its wings" or something like that.'

This means that every time I learn something new, I can demonstrate it. It is almost like something material that I can own. I learned something that I can show. It is tangible. Therefore Level 1 is not a problem for most students.

The transition to Level 2 happens when I have learned the movements and can perform them more or less fluently in the form, and, if I am learning the sequence of a form, no longer have to think about which hand goes where and which movement comes next. I simply flow the form, even if I am thinking about my grandmother's birthday. I can simply run through the form without any difficulty in the sequencing.

Additionally, I have received a degree of structural correction, even if I can only perform it at a relatively superficial level. This means that a certain awareness of the so-called 'Qi flow' is starting to emerge. At times, it feels pleasant. You could say that, on average, this is how Taiji practitioners feel at the end of Level 1.

All forms of Taijiquan consist of a sequence of different movements or techniques. The names for the individual movements usually get their meaning from the techniques themselves, but often times they come from historical-cultural or mythological associations.

In Level 2 the student begins to examine in depth the external and internal principles of Taijiquan – the 'wai san he' ('the three external connections') and the 'nei san he' ('the three internal connections').

This is not to say that these terms were not used during Level 1. But now the student slowly starts to be aware of these connections and goes beyond mere imagination of these concepts.

External unions

Shou yu zhu he – the hands and feet are connected.

Zhou yu xi he – the elbows and knees are connected.

Jian yu kua he – the shoulders and hips are connected.

The external unions mean the connections between the shoulder (jian) + hip (kua), the elbow (zhou) + knee (xi), and the hands (shou) + feet (zhu). The internal unions are the connections between the heart (xin) + mind (Yi), internal energy (Qi) + external strength (li), and the tendons (jin) + bones (gu). These are not just catchwords describing a simple concept, such as the shoulder should be placed above the hip, and that's it. We are talking here of profound concepts which evoke an ever-increasing refinement of the body as well as the mind, and which require a very precise performance of the form; which in turn implies that I need to be corrected very accurately in the movements of the form, because I still have not reached the level at which I can position and correct myself sufficiently on my own. This means that I need somebody who can align me correctly, so that all these connections can also engage all the other parts of the body with their corresponding aspects. The 'three external connections' are ultimately only types of categories for all areas of the body that connect with their own opposite in the body. The precise control of these connections is a very exciting affair; now I am not just learning to be really aware of the feeling of the body in union, I am also learning to cultivate it. Through the internal connections I experience what it means to be 'fully aware'. And what it means to be able to perceive and activate energy within the body.

Internal unions

Xin yu Yi he – the heart and mind are connected.

Qì yu lì he – Qì and strength are connected.

Jin yu gu he – the tendons and bones are connected.

Then I learn to control this energy in a particular form, that is, using consciousness as the means to let it circulate within the body. Or even better: learning to support this natural process instead of hindering it. And I experience what it means to control an external movement by this means.

This is how I learn to dissolve blockages in my body.

On the other hand, the tangible, the apparent, ceases more and more. I can no longer come home and report something new. I already know all the stories. All the principles have been explained to me a hundred thousand times. There isn't anything to make my friends sit up and take notice. Nothing new happens. I didn't even learn a new movement. And if I am not a forms collector – which is another hobby – but am truly interested in the form as a means to develop something, then I start to become aware of the internal and external connections within the form. If I truly want to practise Gong Fu, I will not quickly say 'OK, there are no more forms to be learned here, perhaps I will look elsewhere, where I can learn some new movements.' Continually learning new forms is neither good nor bad. It just stays at the same level; the process of development is missing. This is not a mistake, but it does not bring progress in Gong Fu – or at most in breadth, but not in depth. Finding depth means examining the process of the internal and external principles.

This examination takes patience.

By the way: the external principle of 'wai san he' is truly also an internal principle. The principles are called internal and external principles only because one is *more* internal than the other.

Although Level 2 is not represented that way in the illustration, it has much broader scope than Level 1.

As mentioned already, I do not learn anything tangibly new that I can take away with me. And therefore it is very difficult for many people to work through this level, or, more accurately, through the first half of this level. Precisely because there appears to be nothing new, two things can happen. On the one hand I may get the feeling that I am not learning anything anymore; I have the feeling of knowing it all already. The form feels pretty comfortable by now, and when I practise it calms me. Everything feels cohesive, and when I have finished I feel as if I am floating on a cloud of energy. This gives me the feeling that I am already pretty good at Taijiquan.

I am already on a level at which I could go to a tournament and perhaps win a trophy for performing the form. That is to say, I am at a level where I am gaining outside recognition along the lines of: 'Wow, that's looking really good.' I develop the feeling that I have already learned something, I can do it, and I do not feel challenged enough during lessons. After all, I am a champion. And as long as I do not practise Pushing Hands with anybody all this time, I can maintain this feeling. However, if I do practise Pushing Hands, then for the most part I will see that I cannot really do anything more or less than I was able to do before. No really new ability has arisen. My stance and actions collapse, just as before. Of course this causes a bit of frustration, because now, apparently, I can do it all, and it feels great, but all the same, it still isn't really working.

On the other hand, the feeling may grow that Taijiquan is nonsense. I am good at it, but still nothing is really happening, nothing is any different. The understanding of the internal processes – that are coming next – is there superficially, but is so hard to grasp and so difficult to apply that this is enough for me to slide into depression. 'I will never learn this, this is too complicated for me, I will have to work on it forever.' This means I have just developed too high a degree of awe. 'I, at least, will never learn this' is a phase that might arise later.

All this occurs at the beginning of Level 2 when outwardly nothing new is added and the feeling easily arises that nothing is

happening, I am making no progress even though I am practising every day.

Often this happens unconsciously; it becomes too internal, and I do not want to face the real problems. To talk about it and to pretend to be a great master is much easier than getting to grips with the real difficulties.

At this point many bail out. Either consciously, because they see these reasons and say: 'I'm not doing this.' Or because they get bored, or they intuitively resist from their ego and then get the idea that another hobby is much more interesting. Or they believe that they learned everything already, and stop coming to classes. 'I continue practising by myself, and I know it is for the best, and I have to work through this. I already know everything they teach in the classes, so I might as well do it by myself at home.' They then continue to practise alone for years, even though they are far from achieving Level 4, or even Level 3, and barely Level 2, and in the end they are only walking on the spot.

If after three years they once again attempt Pushing Hands, they will see that they are just as bad as they were three years before. This means no development has happened. I like to take Pushing Hands as an example because it is a great means of testing certain things beyond the possibility of doubt. Of course it is the same with all other aspects of Taijiquan. Are you more relaxed? Do you still get upset over as many trivial matters as before? Of course this can be tested on many other levels. For example, health: do I catch cold significantly less frequently than before? But let's keep it simple. Let's stay with Taijiquan as a martial art. Let's take a look at the martial abilities as a test of the system. In this regard it is quite unimportant if I, as a practitioner, am actually interested in martial art or not. The Taiji scene is quite diverse and the majority has no interest in the martial arts aspects. However, this is irrelevant for training, because 95 per cent of training occurs only with and within myself. Traditionally, Taijiquan does not make use of sparring or punchbag practice, such as we are familiar with from the so-called external and modern systems. This is definitely not a big part of the training. The path is basically the same for someone

who is interested in martial arts as it is for someone who is not (or even disapproves of it). Standing meditation is still standing meditation. The Reeling Silk exercises are still the Reeling Silk exercises, the forms are still the forms. The corrections are no different. Nothing is different.

Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang confines himself in his article about the five levels to the martial application of the system as an indicator of success. Therefore I will also mostly use this reasoning in my commentary. But, again, as a reminder: All achievements which show progress in the martial arts aspect also show progress in health and spiritual development. This is true as long as the training follows the correct path and is done in the full sense of 'Wude'.

'Wude' consists of the 'wu' symbol, which stands for everything martial, and 'de' symbol, which stands for virtue. It relates to the relevance of martial arts for physical and mental/moral education into a peaceful being with respect for all beings and things.

About 99 per cent of Taiji practitioners (students as well as teachers) worldwide are at Level 1 and the beginning of Level 2. After the second half of Level 2, suddenly something happens. Now I am past this difficult phase and I suddenly notice a real intensity of the internal and external connections. Now I am becoming aware of the truth of these principles, because they are slowly starting to have an effect within me. This is why one thing or another is starting to work, even during Pushing Hands. Now I notice a distinct difference from before. I can stand better. I am able to do many things I could not do before. Locking techniques that are being used on me lose their effectiveness. My own locks are hard to escape. I suddenly can feel more energy, and can control it better. I can do many things I could only read about in the past. Above all, though, my body-mind awareness is changing and so a particular change occurs relatively spontaneously. No longer do I have to force myself to practise ('I should practise because my teacher says so'), but rather the opposite. Now practising is very enjoyable. Now I voluntarily try to practise

more. Now begins the phase in which some people want to limit their other hobbies or activities, so that they can practise more. Visits to the movies become less frequent, so the forms can be practised. This is because an energy connection has occurred within the body which results in a very pleasant sense of well-being. This feeling is now more important than the one I used to get from going to the movies or drinking certain quantities of alcohol. After all, we strive all day after feelings of comfort, and not all of them are healthy. Not all of them deliver meaningful development. Here we have a meaningful development that can develop a sense of well-being which is much more profound than the one we get from unhealthy habits such as smoking, unhealthy eating, or drugs. After having this experience it is much easier to choose Taijiquan. Now it is easy to give up unhealthy habits. I notice how this 'Taiji experience' keeps pulling me more and more away from unhealthy activities. In the past I may have enjoyed being at a party very much, but practising Taiji the next day I noticed right away that I had sacrificed a little bit of progress. Now I prefer to just make a short visit to the party – or not go at all – and continue practising normally the next day, without any loss. It simply feels better. It is no longer a rational decision.

And this brings us to the next point. I do get this feeling, but it is not yet consistent. It disappears again. That also depends a little on how I feel that day. It is the same in Pushing Hands. Some things are starting to work, but others are still not. My structure still collapses partly, I fall, or my locks are not as effective as I would like them to be. This is about the middle of Level 2.

From the end of Level 1 to the beginning of Level 2 is generally the phase in which Westerners like to practise a lot of Pushing Hands, albeit in a framework in which a certain level of energy is left out, a quiet, soft framework, so to speak, which usually shows disapproval if someone is too aggressive or wants to push too hard. This is perhaps because one does not possess this martial character, or want to. Many in the 'Taiji scene' do not have the quality of wanting to 'fight'. The 'aggression' isn't accepted. On the other hand, one intuitively feels that one wouldn't even pass this test. Both these reasons can also overlap. In any event, the majority of people in this

sphere has not yet reached or completed Level 2. When the level of ability rises one begins to be more interested in the more serious and higher energy applications, because intuitively one can take a more secure position and 'hold one's ground'. This only begins in the middle of Level 2, and therefore it is sensible to practise only with soft energy up to this point.

Of course there is also a small group of practitioners who only want to push and fight and do not care for the principles. This group is certainly open to 'going a little harder'. However, we are concerned here with real development and not with eternally repeating competition without progress.

It is clear, then, that by the middle of Level 2 I had already learned something real. Whenever I do something calmly and softly it is possible for me – in contrast to Level 1 – to notice certain things and to deal with them, which means that I can induce change, yielding while I advance elsewhere, or keeping my balance while my opponent's balance is broken, etc. This is the normal game which is practised during most Pushing Hands meets in the West. This type of Pushing Hands with its slow and soft movements can be done with great success beginning from the middle of Level 2. One rarely loses. If, however, one is pushed aggressively, one usually goes flying. This changes in Level 3.

One reader or another may think that a limit of 99 per cent seems high. So let's take a closer look at this number.

Ninety-nine per cent means literally that one in 100 Taiji practitioners already has such abilities at his command. For a city such as Hamburg this would mean, for example, that at a fairly realistic estimate of 5000 Taiji practitioners, 50 would already have gained this martial arts ability from their training. For a city such as Beijing, with an estimated 1.3 million practitioners, it would mean that more than 10,000 people would have gained abilities at and above the middle of Level 2. Therefore, we can see that 99 per cent is rather a conservative estimate, and a reminder to beware of ranking oneself too high too soon.

At Level 3 I have reached the ability that allows me to make appropriate changes even within the environment of these aggressive energies, and to keep my centre while my opponent's centre collapses. Now it is no longer so important to me whether my partner is gentle with me or whether he pushes me harder, because now it is no more of a threat to me than gentle pushing was in the past. This can even be good for me, because now I can deal with my mistakes on a more difficult level. Therefore it is not a problem if I get pushed more aggressively. Nothing happens anymore, in the truest sense of the word. Now we can seriously start to talk about the art of self-defence. This is the beginning of serious Gong Fu; of cultivation. In his description of the completion of Level 2, the grandmaster writes of an undisciplined but 'new hand' which one has acquired, and at Level 3 he writes expressly of skill; even if not at a very high level, seen from the perspective of the highest level.

There are only very few in the world who have developed Level 3 skills. There are correspondingly fewer at Level 4. And hardly anybody has achieved Level 5. Within the Taiji scene, most happens at Level 1. Those teachers known as 'good', in the West as well as the East, are in the first half of Level 2, with a few exceptions. In the middle of Level 2 they are often times already called masters.

Whoever has mastered Level 3 enters a stage in which he has developed real qualities and in which he can no longer deviate from the path; even if he only continues to practise by himself. At Level 4 in fact I no longer need to attend classes, even though I would still progress faster with a teacher. But at this point it is not easy to find a teacher anymore. This is because if someone has been fortunate enough to reach this level, he has probably already caught up with his teacher, or, in the true sense of the word, he may have outlived him. Only very few in the history of Taijiquan still have, or had, a teacher at this point. This doesn't mean that there aren't any more corrections to be made. There just may be nobody around who can make them. The grandmaster writes that even at Level 5 learning and practice never cease, because there is no state in which one could not still improve.

One can always progress further, and never really achieves 100 per cent of all that is possible.

While I am occupied with learning external concepts at Level 1, such as forms and movements, aligning the body, developing a certain kind of stable softness, creating movements from the centre, etc., at Level 2 we are increasingly concerned with reaching greater depth. Here I work on building the energy flow in each individual movement completely, and controlling it. Within Level 1 these are present only fragmentarily and intermittently, so that some movements feel comfortable, while others do not.

From Level 3, the circles become smaller. Level 3 is the stage in which it is said that the large circles become medium circles. The meaning of this relates not to the outer movements, but to the inner energetic spirals. These become smaller, and one could also say that the energy becomes more dense. This causes the movements to become ever more refined, more penetrating, and stronger.

Level 4 has much the same content as Level 3, but on a significantly higher level and Level 5 is a certain form of disengagement. This form of disengagement is the so-called 'invisible mystery'. Now mysticism comes into play.

Regarding martial ability we can say that there is none at Level 1. At Level 2 there are martial abilities in a slow, soft framework. However, someone who has progressed beyond Level 2 will have real ability. He will, as a rule, be in a state of mind in which tournaments and competition no longer interest him. This is no longer because of an intuitive fear that he cannot stand his ground, but rather due to spiritual maturity. This is the reason why we no longer find masters with a high level of skill in tournaments or at Pushing Hands meets. This, however, is not to be over-simplified. If I have reached the second part of Level 2, I can show, feel, and be aware of abilities while somebody pushes gently, shoves, strikes, or punches. This is when I begin to notice a certain superiority – although, if somebody was to attack me aggressively or take me by surprise, my structure would still often collapse. This changes at Level 3. At Level 3 one should be able to ward off and neutralize aggressive and powerful pushes, and at the same time

render the opponent passive and unable to act. In the moment of contact the attacker becomes the attacked, because in the moment of contact the roles are reversed. We stay in our centre, while the attacker loses his. Originally the opposite was planned: the attacker wanted to stay in his centre and we were supposed to lose ours. In the moment contact occurs, regardless of how it is made, the exact opposite happens. The attacker loses his centre, but we do not. This means that this is the moment in which the attacker can be forced into passivity, because without being in one's centre, no useful attack is even possible. It is true that I may not yet be able to direct my own explosive energy, the 'fajin'-power, which is now slowly developing in my Taijiquan. The explosive (fajin) movements are theoretically not an exclusive feature of the Chen style. Theoretically they are also present in other Taiji styles. They are rarely practised in other Taiji systems, though, but the principle of the movement, whether slow, fast, or explosive, should be the same everywhere. Generally speaking, in Chen style we never talk about different systems, but at the most about different dialects. Whether someone practises explosive movements in his system, or not, is not a question of Taijiquan, but rather a question of whether this is, or can be, taught. In the end, everything follows the same principle, the one Taiji principle. And there are not three different ones, only one, which of course within the framework of one's own understanding (or lack of it) may be expressed and interpreted in different ways. Just as a language may sound different in different places but is still the same language, even if sometimes a dialect is so strong that the rest of us can barely understand it.

At Level 4, I succeed in dissolving and neutralizing the power of the other, as well as in the targeted and appropriate use of my own explosive power. Now we come to those wonderful stories that we have missed for so long during our own practice; such as people flying through the air – and for real, not posed with students. In tournaments the participants face each other, the referee whistles and we expect one contestant to be catapulted several meters out of the ring. In reality, however, all we are seeing is a big tussle. The reason for this is that the participants just have not yet reached

this high level yet. That doesn't mean tournaments are bad. It only means that the people have not progressed that far and that almost all participants are on a similar level. This has to be understood correctly. You will not see a grandmaster facing a beginner, but rather two people, one of whom has studied for perhaps four years, and the other for six. There isn't too much of a difference there. I remember Grandmaster Feng Zhi Qiang. I was at his house and had asked a particular question. He looked at me and asked me: 'Jan, how long have you been practising Taijiquan?' This was back in 1994 and I responded: 'Seven years.' He laughed and said: 'You just barely started. After 50 years I myself have barely scratched the surface.'

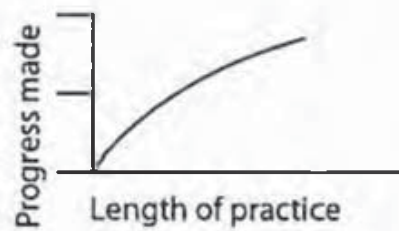
In tournaments students usually face other students; masters do not face other masters. And even then, if the masters were on a similarly high level, they would either do nothing, or start a mock combat.

Therefore in a tournament we have the following problem: A generally low level which is relatively equal between the opponents. Don't expect any great demonstration of skill to happen. However, if you ever have the pleasure of witnessing a serious competition between a high level and a low level, you will get to see these beautiful effects for real.

This means that at Level 4 we can actually demonstrate these effects, not just put on a show. Level 4 is about not only directly dissolving a large amount of force, but also applying one's own power explosively and targeted.

At Level 5 there emerges a freedom about which I will talk more later on.

It should be noted here that progress proceeds at a relatively even pace, although subjectively for us it may feel increasingly slow. In the following diagram I represent length of practice relative to progress made:



In the beginning the curve is visibly shorter and steeper, and it grows longer and flatter with time. This is the difficulty that I described at the beginning of Level 2: In the beginning one perceives daily progress, but as time goes on, it seems to slow down.

Later the steepness of the curve lessens, and progress is not easily seen over longer periods of time. Even later one has students, and one's own development is no longer in the steep part of the progress curve. The students, however, begin at the beginning. Therefore they seem to progress relatively fast, while the teacher appears to have moved only a little bit further on. Even though he may have practised just as much, it appears as though his students have progressed much faster over the same time, but in the end, they also will be at the teacher's former position on this curve. This means that subjective perception of progress will slow down for the students too, as the years go by.

This is one of the reasons why some students seem to approach their teachers very quickly, but can never actually catch up with them. This assumes that both parties practise equally hard.

Since there are no shortcuts or overtaking lanes, but only concrete practice, the pace of progress actually stays the same.

In the following part of the book we will examine all the levels again with the help of the original text. We shall pay particular attention to Level 3 (beginning at the middle of Level 2), 4, and 5.

Level 1
of Taijiquan

太极拳入门

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

第一层功夫

练习太极拳要求立身中正，虚领顶劲，松肩沉肘，含胸塌腰，开髋屈膝，达到心气下降，气沉丹田。而初学者一下不可能掌握这些要领，但应按照逐式要求的方向、角度、位置、手足运行的路线等进行练习。因此，这一阶段对身体各部位的要求不必过于强调，适当地简化。如：对头和上体要求虚领顶劲、含胸塌腰，第一层功夫只要求头自然端正，立身中正，不前俯后仰、左右歪斜即可，这和初学写字一样，只要笔划对就行。但练拳时，从肢体上看，动作僵硬，外刚内空，有猛打、猛冲、猛起、猛落，有断劲、顶劲，系正常现象，只要坚持每天认真练习，一般有半年时间即可熟练拳架，并且随着动作质量的提高，将会逐渐引起内气在肢体内的活动，即达到以外形引内气的阶段。由招熟而逐渐懂劲的过程，为第一层功夫。

第一层功夫在技击方面达到的效果是很有限的。由于动作不够协调，运动不成体系，姿势达不到标准，存在着僵劲、断劲、丢劲、顶劲、拳架上有凹凸缺陷处，内气仅有感觉，不能一气贯通，发出来的劲，不是起于脚跟行于腿，主宰于腰，而是一节飞跃到另一节的零断劲。所以第一层功夫练拳适应不了技击。如与不会练武者较量，尚有一定灵活性，虽用不巧，但知道引进落空，有时偶然把对方发出，自己确难以保持身体的平衡。所以称为“一阴九阳根头棍”。何为阴阳？按练习太极拳来说：虚为阴，实为阳；合为阴，开为阳；柔为阴，刚为阳。阴与阳，是对立的统一、缺一不可，二者又可以互相转化，把二者按十份计算，练到阴阳相等，即为五阴五阳，这也是练习太极拳的成功标准。第一层功夫“一阴九阳”，刚多柔少，阴阳很不平衡，不能做到刚柔相济，运用自如。所以，在第一层功夫期间，对逐势的技击含义不必追求。

TRANSLATION

When we practise Taijiquan the principles for the various parts of the body are:

- the vertical alignment of the body
- adjusting head and neck as if the body was suspended from a thread from above
- relaxing the shoulders and sinking the elbows
- relaxing hips and chest, allowing them to sink
- slightly bending the knees and relaxing the lower belly.

With these conditions provided, internal energy will sink to the Dantian in a wholly natural way. Beginners will not be capable of mastering all these points immediately. During the exercise attention must be paid therefore that the body's positions have the proper alignment, that the angle is correct, and that arms and legs are properly coordinated. During this phase the practitioner should not focus too much on the requirements of the single body parts in relation to the movements. Relative simplifications are acceptable.

An example: For head and upper body it is important that neck and head are erect while chest and hips are sunk. Within Level 1 it is sufficient to ensure that head and body are held upright in a natural way, that they neither lean too far to the front or to the back, or too far right or left. It's like learning calligraphy: in the beginning it's important just to ensure that the lines are properly drawn. Therefore in the beginning the movements may feel taut, or solid from the outside, but empty within. Or one may find oneself rigid while doing strikes or punches. Or one may take a sudden uplift or feel the entire body or the torso collapsing. The force we apply will be broken within or overexerted. These mistakes are normal in the beginning.

Those who are devoted enough and train every day can usually learn the form within about a year. Internal energy, Qi, may eventually cause a refinement of the movements within the body and all its joints. One will then be able to reach the

stage of channelling the internal flow of energy by external movements.

Hence, Level 1 of Gong Fu begins with mastering the single stances, so that step by step we may discover and understand the internal and external forces of the body. The martial skills to be reached within Level 1 are still very limited. That is because at this stage the single actions are neither yet very coordinated nor systematic. The single stances are not yet correct, so that the energy or the force being evolved remains stiff and broken, weak, or alternatively too strong. While we practise the form it appears to us as too empty or too angular. While being able to perceive the internal energy, we are not able yet to channel it into each section of our body by way of a movement. Consequently we are still not able to conduct energy straight from the heels into the legs in order to then discharge it while maintaining control over the hips. The beginner remains limited to transferring only partial force from one section of the body to another. In this way Level 1 of Gong Fu cannot be used for purposes of self-defence.

If one should wish, however, to try a test on a person who has no expertise in martial art, up to a certain degree an effect may be achieved. Perhaps that other person has not yet learnt the applications of Taijiquan, and the disciple, by means of deception, might succeed and throw him to the ground, but even then he will usually be unable to maintain his own balance. This stage is described as: 10 per cent Yin and 90 per cent Yang.

But what *are* Yin and Yang?

In the context of Taijiquan, Yin is the emptiness, while Yang embodies the solid. Softness and gentleness are Yin, the forceful and the hard are Yang. Yin and Yang are the union of opposites. Just as neither of the two can be left aside, both are able to substitute each other, capable of changing into each other and transforming. If someone is capable of holding Yin and Yang at balance within himself, we call this 50 per cent, so that the person can make use of his potential by 100 per cent. This would be the highest level and indicate success in practising Taijiquan.

During Level 1 in Taiji-Gong Fu, it is quite normal being limited to 10 per cent Yin and 90 per cent Yang. This means that

Level 1 of Taijiquan

the martial skills are hard rather than gentle, and an imbalance prevails between Yin and Yang. The student is not able yet to replace the hard with the soft, or to perform the applications with simplicity and ease. At this point, when the student is still at Level 1, he should not be too zealous in the pursuit of the adaptability of the single stance.



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang

COMMENTARY

When we practise Taijiquan the principles for the various parts of the body are:

- the vertical alignment of the body
- adjusting head and neck as if the body was suspended from a thread from above
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With these conditions provided, internal energy will sink to the Dantian in a wholly natural way. Beginners will not be capable of mastering all these points immediately. During the exercise attention must be paid therefore that the body's positions have the proper alignment, that the angle is correct, and that

arms and legs are properly coordinated. During this phase the practitioner should not focus too much on the requirements of the single body parts in relation to the movements.

This is because it can lead to tension in the body once again. It is always the same when we are not yet good at something, but want it too much. It is important to calmly accept the slow learning process, because in the end this is the fastest way to master Taijiquan.

Relative simplifications are acceptable.

An example: For head and upper body it is important that neck and head are erect while chest and hips are sunk. Within Level 1 it is sufficient to ensure that head and body are held upright in a natural way, that they neither lean too far to the front or to the back, or too far right or left. It's like learning calligraphy: in the beginning it's important just to ensure that the lines are properly drawn. Therefore in the beginning the movements may feel taut, or solid from the outside, but empty within.

Here it becomes clear how ambivalent we can be: on the one hand I am too stiff and helpless and have the feeling that nothing works. On the other hand I also have the feeling that it already feels pretty good. It appears 'solid from the outside, but empty within'.

Or one may find oneself rigid while doing strikes or punches. Or one may take a sudden uplift or feel the entire body or the torso collapsing. The force we apply will be broken within or overexerted. These mistakes are normal in the beginning.

Those who are devoted enough and train every day can usually learn the form within about a year.

When reading this time specification you should keep in mind that it was written by a man who is completely immersed in tradition, who even leads this tradition and is attached to the classical-original. This time specification assumes a teacher/student relationship in which both live together and train together intensively every day.

Level 1 of Taijiquan

This also goes for the number of years listed for Levels 2, 3, 4, and 5; this is not achievable by going to a group class twice a week.

Internal energy, Qi, may eventually cause a refinement of the movements within the body and all its joints. One will then be able to reach the stage of channelling the internal flow of energy by external movements.

This means that I can certainly have an awareness of Qi during Level 1, but I must first learn to master the forms and postures.

Hence, Level 1 of Gong Fu begins with mastering the single stances, so that step by step we may discover and understand the internal and external forces of the body. The martial skills to be reached within Level 1 are still very limited. That is because at this stage the single actions are neither yet very coordinated nor systematic. The single stances are not yet correct, so that the energy or the force being evolved remains stiff and broken, weak, or alternatively too strong. While we practise the form it appears to us as too empty or too angular.

This reminds us of the term 'fang song'. This Chinese term for 'relaxation' means not to be limp, as we are when we lie on the couch and watch TV. 'Fang song' incorporates the degree of body relaxation which allows for optimal functioning, that is, optimal energetic transmission. This means neither empty nor angular, but exactly in between, in that place where everything optimally harmonizes with each other.

While being able to perceive the internal energy, we are not able yet to channel it into each section of our body by way of a movement. Consequently we are still not able to conduct energy straight from the heels into the legs in order to then discharge it while maintaining control over the hips. The beginner remains limited to transferring only partial force from one section of the body to another. In this way Level 1 of Gong Fu cannot be used for purposes of self-defence.

If one should wish, however, to try a test on a person who has no expertise in martial art, up to a certain degree an effect may be achieved. Perhaps that other person has not yet learnt the applications of Taijiquan, and the disciple, by means of deception, might succeed and throw him to the ground, but even then he will usually be unable to maintain his own balance.

This can occur, for example, with a trick that the other is not prepared for.

This stage is described as: 10 per cent Yin and 90 per cent Yang.

But what *are* Yin and Yang?

In the context of Taijiquan, Yin is the emptiness, while Yang embodies the solid. Softness and gentleness are Yin, the forceful and the hard are Yang. Yin and Yang are the union of opposites. Just as neither of the two can be left aside, both are able to substitute each other, capable of changing into each other and transforming. If someone is capable of holding Yin and Yang at balance within himself, we call this 50 per cent, so that the person can make use of his potential by 100 per cent.

This principle of 50/50 is not to be understood in an exact and rigid mathematical way, but, just like the Yin–Yang symbol, as something flowing and changing. The point is to create a balanced harmony between the two poles of Yin and Yang, even if in the rhythm of a day perhaps at times there is more Yin or more Yang. The important thing is that there is a balance overall. As an analogy: The sun doesn't shine every day until 3pm and then it rains until 6pm; but sometimes the sun shines, and sometimes it rains, so that everything grows and prospers and is in harmony with one another.

The balance of 50 per cent Yin and 50 per cent Yang would be the highest level or an indicator of success in the practice of Taijiquan. This would be Level 5.

During Level 1 in Taiji-Gong Fu, it is quite normal being limited to 10 per cent Yin and 90 per cent Yang. This means that the martial skills are hard rather than gentle, and an imbalance prevails between Yin and Yang. The student is not able yet to

Level 1 of Taijiquan

replace the hard with the soft, or to perform the applications with simplicity and ease.

Simplicity and ease can only occur where inner blockages cease. When I work forcefully, grimly, or with tension, I cannot execute effortless movements, because I constantly collide within myself. Even if I want to make them effortless, I cannot, unless I make them empty, meaning not connected in the body, but then they have no effect.

The term 'empty' ('kong') is used in two different ways in connection with Taijiquan. In a negative sense, it describes an unsubstantial movement without effect. In a positive sense it is 'emptiness', an essential principle of the 13 basic techniques of Taijiquan and the highest goal of awareness.

At this point, when the student is still at Level 1, he should not be too zealous in the pursuit of the adaptability of the single stance.

Here we find the reasoning why in classical Taijiquan one should not learn Pushing Hands or other applications in the beginning. There is no effect. You are welcome to do it, but it doesn't accomplish anything. This is because the technique does not work by the technique alone, but because of the Gong Fu behind it. This means we are talking about a level on which the techniques work, regardless of whether the opponent knows that, or whether he defends himself or not. None of that plays a big part anymore. As long as the other doesn't know or my success is based on a surprise attack, I am using a type of cleverness. This does not have much to do with Gong Fu. Gong Fu is something much more fundamental.

This last point also means that self-defence courses which are limited to a few weeks of training do not have much effect. They can even be misleading if one gains a false sense of self-confidence. Suddenly, you may walk into a 'dark park' through which you would not normally have walked, simply because you have completed such a course.

Level 2
of Taijiquan

五
层
功
夫

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

第二层功夫

从第一层功夫末期，有内气活动的感觉开始至第三层功夫的初期，为第二层功夫。第二层功夫是进一步克服练拳时身体内外产生的僵劲、丢顶和动作不协调的现象，使内气按照拳架动作的要求有规律地在体内运行，达到一气贯通，内外协调一致。

完成第一层功夫，已经能够熟练地按逐势动作初步的要求来练习，有了内气活动的感觉，但还不能掌握内气在体内运行，其原因主要有二：其一，对身体各个部位的具体要求和互相配合的关系皆未准确地掌握，如：含胸过度则弯腰弓背，塌腰过度则挺胸凸臀，因此必须进一步严格地要求，准确地掌握身体各个部位的要求和相互之间的关系，解决矛盾，使之统一起来，达到周身相合（即内合和外合。内合——心与意合、气与力合、筋与骨合，外合——手与足合、肘与膝合、肩与髋合），内外俱开，同时开中寓合，合中寓开，一开一合，开合相承。其二，在练拳当中出现顾此失彼的现象，即某个部位动作较快，过了，产生顶劲；某个部位动作较慢，不及，产生丢劲，二者皆违背了太极拳的运动规律。陈式太极拳要求一举一动都不离缠丝劲。拳论中说：“缠丝劲发源于肾，处处皆有，无时不然”。在练习太极拳的过程中，严格掌握缠丝法（即缠绕螺旋的运动方法）和缠丝劲（即用缠丝法练出来的劲），需在松肩沉肘、含胸塌腰、开髋屈膝等要求下，以腰为轴，节节贯串。手往里旋转，以手领肘，以肘领肩，以肩领腰（指的是该侧的腰，实质上还是以腰为轴），手往外旋转，以腰催肩，以肩催肘，以肘催手。表现在上肢是旋腕转膀，表现在下肢是旋踝转腿，表现在躯干是旋腰转背，三者结合起来，形成一条根在脚、主宰于腰而形于手指的空间旋转曲线。在练拳的过程中，如果感到某一动作有不得势或不得劲之处，就可以依据缠丝劲顺遂调整一下腰腿，以求得动作协调，这样即可使动作得到纠正。所以，在注意身体各部位的要求，使之周身相合的同时，掌握缠丝法和缠丝劲的运动规律，是第二层功夫练习过程中解决矛盾的手段和自我纠正的方法。

在第一层功夫期间，练拳者开始学拳架，架子熟练就能

感觉到内气在身体内活动，于是很感兴趣，不会有厌倦之感。但有的进入第二层功夫，却感到没有什么新鲜之处，同时往往对要领产生误解，掌握不准确，练起来很别扭，或者有时候练得非常顺遂，发劲也是呼呼带风，但推手时却用不上，因此容易产生烦闷情绪，失去信心而中断。只有以百折不挠的精神，处处循规蹈矩，刻苦盘架子，把周身练成一体，一动全动，组成一个完整的体系，才能达到在运动中不丢不顶，任其变化、圆转自如。常言道：理不明，延明师，路不清，访良友；理明路通，持之以恒，终将成功。拳论中说：“人人各具一太极，但看用功不用功”。又说：“只要用功之久，而一旦豁然贯通矣！”一般需四年即可完成第二层功夫。达到一气贯通的程度，便会恍然大悟，此时练拳信心百倍，越练兴趣越高，欲罢不能。

第二层功夫初期的技击表现与第一层功夫的技击表现一样，实用价值不大。第二层功夫末期已经接近第三层功夫，尚有一定的技击作用。下面按照第二层功夫中期阶段的技击表现进行介绍（以下第三、四、五层都按中期阶段的技击表现进行介绍）。

推手和练拳是分不开的，练拳时存在什么问题，在推手时就会出现什么破绽，给对方以可乘之机。所以太极拳要求周身相随，切勿妄动。推手时要求“棚捋挤按须认真，上下相随人难侵，任他巨力来打我，牵动四两拨千斤”。第二层功夫是寻求内气贯通、调整身法、达到节节贯串的阶段，而调整身法的过程就是妄动，因而在推手时还无法指挥如意，对方会专门寻找这些薄弱环节，或者故意诱使你产生顶、匾、丢、抗的毛病而出奇制胜。因为推手时对方的进攻不会给你调整身法的时间，而是利用你的缺陷，乘隙而入，使你受力失重，或被迫退步，勉强地化去来力。当然，如果对方进攻速度较慢，劲力短，进逼不紧，给了调整身法的余地，你也能比较理想地化掉对方的进攻。总之，第二层功夫期间，不管进攻和走化都是勉强的，往往是先下手为强，后下手遭殃。此时尚未完全达到舍己从人，随机应变，虽能走化，但还易出现丢匾和顶抗等毛病。因此，在推手时不能按棚捋挤按的次序进行，所以说：“二阴八阳是散手”。

TRANSLATION

Level 2 begins with the last stage of Level 1, when the student is able to perceive the flow of internal energy, Qi, and it concludes within the first stage of Level 3. Level 2 still deals with resolving imperfections, for example:

- rigid force becoming evident during Taijiquan training
- too much or insufficient exertion of force
- uncoordinated movements.

Resolving imperfections provides an organic flow of internal energy through the body in a way that is consistent with the requirements of each movement. In the end these efforts should result in a gentle flow of Qi throughout the body. This will create a good coordination between internal energy and external movement.

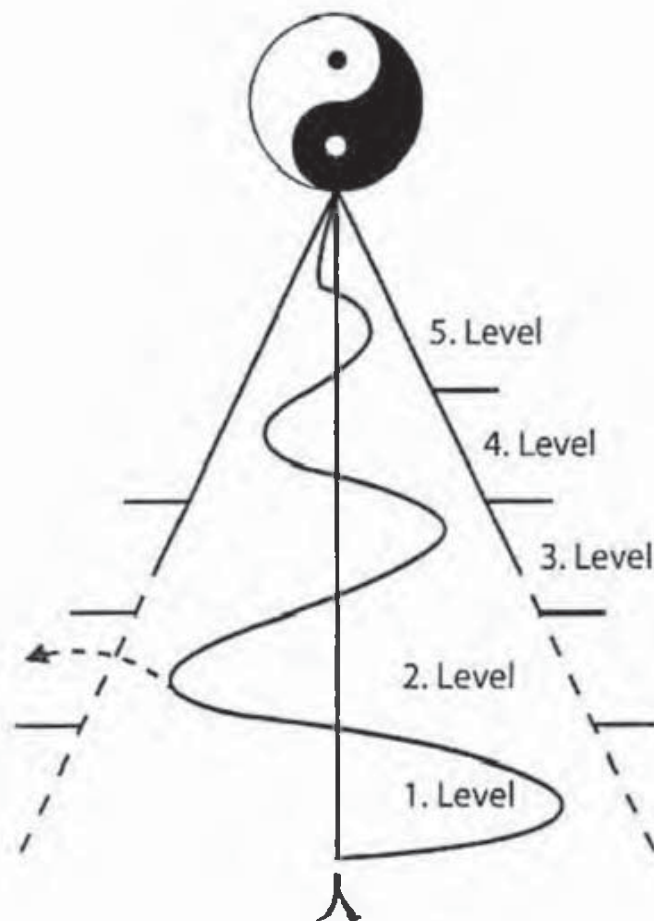
When the student has mastered Level 1, he should be able to easily perform the preparatory requirements that each posture or movement demands. The student is able to perceive the flow of internal energy, even though he is not able to control it yet. There are two reasons for this.

First: The student has not yet sufficiently mastered the distinct requirements necessary for each body section and their coordination. If, for example, the chest is sunk too much, neither the hip nor the back will be straight. Or, if hip and waist are too relaxed, the chest and bottom may protrude. Therefore, there is an absolute necessity for precision in order to comply with the distinct requirements of all body parts, so that they can move in union.

This allows the entire body to integrate and accordingly to be in full and coordinated unity. The latter means coordination between internal and external unity, or their integration. Inner closure implies the coordinated incorporation of heart (xin) and mind (Yi), of internal energy (Qi) and force (li), of tendons (jin) and bones (gu). External integration of the movements implies the coordinated union of the hands with the feet, of the elbows with the knees, and the shoulders with the hips. At the same time the body should be open in other sections, so

Level 2 of Taijiquan

that opening and closing movements unite and complete each other.



Second: The student finds it hard to control and synchronize the various sections of the body. This may, for example, cause one part of the body to move faster than the rest, which may result in too much force. Or one part of the body moves too slowly compared with the whole, or it moves without enough force. In this way the entire amount of force would be undeveloped. Both phenomena contradict the principle of Taijiquan. Every single movement in Chen Taijiquan must conform to the principle of the Reeling Silk exercise (or 'can si gong'). In terms of Taijiquan theory the 'can si jin', 'the power of spinning the silk thread', arises from the kidneys and is found at all times in all sections of the body. This enables the entire body to be integrated in a coordinated way, and includes the union of internal and external movement.

Internal integration implies the fusion of heart and mind, of internal energy and force, and of tendons and bones. External integration implies the fusion of hands and feet, of elbows and knees, and of shoulders and hips. Each movement finds a correspondence within. During the process of learning Taijiquan, the method of Reeling Silk and the force arising from it cannot be performed until:

- shoulders, elbows, chest and hips are as relaxed and permeable as the lower belly and the knees
- the hip is the pivot of all movements of the body.

When we start rotating our hands counter-clockwise, the hands should move the elbows, and these should move the shoulders. The shoulders should move the hips on the corresponding side. In reality, however, it's always at the hip that movement begins. When the hands are rotating clockwise, the hip should guide the shoulder, which should guide the elbow, which should guide the hand.

Within the upper body, the wrists and the arms should be gyrating, that is, doing circular moves, while the lower body, the ankles and the upper legs should rotate. In the same way the torso, the hip and the back move by rotation.

While building up the movements across the three sections of the body, we should be careful about the spiralling connection within this space. The spiral connection begins in the legs, is centred in the hips and ends in the fingertips. If the practitioner feels uncomfortable during the single stances of the form, he is advised to correct the position of the legs and hips according to the movement for coordinating all sections of the body, so that the energy flow of spinning the silk (can si jin) can be created. In this way every mistake can be corrected. If we now pay attention to all requirements of each part of the body for reaching a full coordination of the entire body, then mastering the rhythm of every Reeling Silk exercise and the force resulting from it and its transfer into the form, is a way of resolving all conflicts that may occur therein. This method of self-correction of any mistake is used during the exercises of Taijiquan once we have mastered Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu.

During Level 1 of Taiji-Gong Fu, the student learns the various forms. After he has become familiar with them he can perceive the flow of internal energy inside the body. During this phase he may feel fascinated and motivated; each training session yields new impressions. After entering Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu he may feel that by and large he is no longer learning anything new. At the same time, he will misunderstand several very crucial aspects. The student will not have mastered sufficiently these important points, and he will feel unskilled in his movements. Conversely, the student may execute the form in a very smooth and gentle way. He may also feel able to emanate quite an amount of force. However, he is not yet able to verify this during Pushing Hands. Some students then lose interest or lose confidence, so that they may give up their training.

The only way of reaching a level where enough force can be evolved, not too hard and not too soft, where matters can be consciously changed and applied, allowing one to move effectively yet with simplicity and ease, is the way of endurance and keeping strictly with the principle. The student must practise the form in a very determined way so that the movements of the entire body align and coordinate. The result will be activity that can be released by one single small movement inside any part of the body. This way a complete and inherent system of movement is created.

There is a saying that goes:

If the principle is not clearly understood, consult a teacher. If the path is not clearly in sight, search for the help of a friend. When both the principle and the method have been understood and training is done with persistence, success will in the end prevail.

It is said in the classical texts on Taijiquan that everyone can achieve the highest goal if only he keeps working hard enough on it, and that if the student will only persist, the highest success will suddenly materialize.

Generally we can say that most people are able to reach Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu within four years. Someone who has

reached a state of perceiving a gentle flow of Qi inside his body will suddenly begin to understand. The student at this point will be full of confidence and enthusiasm and will train with sheer joy. In some cases a strong urge may develop to practise more and more, and not to stop at all!

At the beginning of Level 2 the martial abilities are limited similarly to Level 1 of Taiji-Gong Fu. The skill isn't sufficient yet for real application. At the end of Level 2 and at the beginning of Level 3, martial ability will be achieved to a certain extent.

The next sequence deals with martial art abilities which should be established mid-way through Level 2. This will be described separately for the following levels.

Training of the Pushing Hands (tui shou) and practising Taijiquan (the forms) cannot be separated from each other. Whatever shortcuts or simplifications we might have allowed ourselves during form training will emerge as a weak point in Pushing Hands. This will in turn allow the opponent to take advantage over us. Therefore it must be borne in mind again and again that during training every single part of the body is interwoven and coordinated with the other. No unnecessary movements should be performed.

During the Pushing Hands 'peng' (ward off), 'lu' (give way), 'ji' (press), and 'an' (push) should be executed with such a degree of precision that the upper and lower halves of the body work in harmony. That will make it very difficult for our opponent to attack. The proverb says: 'Regardless of how much force is exerted, I mobilize four ounces in order to deflect 1000 pounds.'

Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu aims by way of correction of the single stances at achieving a gentle and continuous flow of Qi inside the body. Furthermore it aims at reaching a stage where the Qi inside the body permeates every single joint, as required by every single sequence. This process of adjusting each movement necessarily involves the temporary use of unimportant or uncoordinated movements. Therefore it is not yet possible in this phase to apply martial skills during Pushing Hands in a controlled way. The opponent will focus on these weak points. He may either attempt to defeat the learner by exploiting the error or over-exertion, collapsing, falling down.

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or by the direct confrontation of force with force. During Pushing Hands the advancing opponent will leave no time for the learner to correct his movement fully. The opponent will exploit the weaknesses of the learner to attack and bring him off balance, or he will force him to retreat in order to avoid the force continuing head on. Should, however, the opponent attack with less and more gentle force and altogether move more slowly, the learner may have time to readjust his body. This way he may perhaps be able to ward off the attack in a more satisfactory way. In terms of the discussion above, it is not possible within Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu to perform either an attack or a defence without greater effort. On this level it is often an advantage to be the first to start an attack. The person forced to react will be in a less favourable situation. On this level one is not able yet to 'forget about oneself' or to match the opponent's moves. No advantage can be gained from the opponent's moves, as one is not able to adapt to the changes and to follow them. While being able to dodge or to ward off an attack, one will still easily commit mistakes, such as falling down or collapsing, overstraining or resisting the force.

For all these reasons, the student is not yet capable of acting during the Pushing Hands in accordance with the principle of 'peng', 'lu', 'ji', and 'an'. A person who has entered this level is characterized as 20 per cent Yin and 80 per cent Yang. This is described as 'a new and undisciplined hand'.

COMMENTARY

Level 2 begins with the last stage of Level 1, when the student is able to perceive the flow of internal energy, Qi, and it concludes within the first stage of Level 3. Level 2 still deals with resolving imperfections, for example:

- rigid force becoming evident during Taijiquan training
- too much or insufficient exertion of force
- uncoordinated movements.

The point is not to use less and less force. It is also important that at times I may not use enough force. This is linked to the type of relaxation, uncoordinated movements, as well as the quality of the force.

Resolving imperfections provides an organic flow of internal energy through the body in a way that is consistent with the requirements of each movement. In the end these efforts should result in a gentle flow of Qi throughout the body. This will create a good coordination between internal energy and external movement.

When the student has mastered Level 1, he should be able to easily perform the preparatory requirements that each posture or movement demands. The student is able to perceive the flow of internal energy, even though he is not able to control it yet. There are two reasons for this.

First: The student has not yet sufficiently mastered the distinct requirements necessary for each body section and their coordination.

This has already been said in the introduction: elementary school – middle school – university. Whoever cannot accept this, and wants to progress too fast, will not reach certain levels.

If, for example, the chest is sunk too much, neither the hip nor the back will be straight. Or, if hip and waist are too relaxed, the chest and bottom may protrude. Therefore, there is an absolute necessity for precision in order to comply with the distinct requirements of all body parts, so that they can move in union.

This allows the entire body to integrate and accordingly to be in full and coordinated unity. The latter means coordination between internal and external unity, or their integration. Inner closure implies the coordinated incorporation of heart (xin) and mind (yi), of internal energy (qi) and force (li), of tendons (jin) and bones (gu). External integration of the movements implies the coordinated union of the hands with the feet, of the elbows with the knees, and the shoulders with the hips. At the same time the body should be open in other sections, so

Level 2 of Taijiquan

that opening and closing movements unite and complete each other.

This is because if there is only closing, it is once again broken; if there is only opening, it would be again separated. This means that if something is closed somewhere, something else must be opened in another place. In the case of 'wai san he', the relaxation within the connection is the opening within the closing.

Second: The student finds it hard to control and synchronize the various sections of the body. This may, for example, cause one part of the body to move faster than the rest, which may result in too much force.

We know this, for example, when we make a movement in which the shoulder moves faster than the centre. Now the force of the shoulder is no longer connected to the force of the centre. This over-exertion of the shoulder does not lead to a stronger impact, but on the contrary, it is less effective.

Or one part of the body moves too slowly compared with the whole, or it moves without enough force. In this way the entire amount of force would be undeveloped. Both phenomena contradict the principle of Taijiquan. Every single movement in Chen Taijiquan must conform to the principle of the Reeling Silk exercise (or 'can si gong').

'Can si gong', 'exercises of the silkworm', illustrate the decisive movement principle within Taijiquan. It is as though the body was woven out of threads of the silkworm. These are not allowed to tear or to stick to each other within the movements. These 'threads' are being uncoiled and wound up by the Dantian continuously. This is an image that symbolizes the concept of guiding energy consciously through the body.

In terms of Taijiquan theory the 'can si jin', 'the power of spinning the silk thread', arises from the kidneys and is found at all times in all sections of the body. This enables the entire body to be integrated in a coordinated way, and includes the union of internal and external movement.

This means that we have to learn an external movement to reach an internal movement, which we then have once again to harmonize with the external movement.

According to old Daoist tradition the essential 'Qi' originates in the kidneys. It is then collected in the Dantian and channeled through the body.

Internal integration implies the fusion of heart and mind, of internal energy and force, and of tendons and bones. External integration implies the fusion of hands and feet, of elbows and knees, and of shoulders and hips. Each movement finds a correspondence within. During the process of learning Taijiquan, the method of Reeling Silk and the force arising from it cannot be performed until:

- shoulders, elbows, chest and hips are as relaxed and permeable as the lower belly and the knees
- the hip is the pivot of all movements of the body.

This means that the whole body is permeable, the whole body is connected, and there is a centre to movement as a whole.

When we start rotating our hands counter-clockwise, the hands should move the elbows, and these should move the shoulders. The shoulders should move the hips on the corresponding side. In reality, however, it's always at the hip that movement begins. When the hands are rotating clockwise, the hip should guide the shoulder, which should guide the elbow, which should guide the hand.

This is a description for the internal energy cycle. Or better: It is an external movement sequence, which is initiated by the internal energy cycle. Energy cycles that lead back to the centre, the so-

called Yin flows, begin in the fingers and go through the shoulders and hips back to the Dantian. The so-called Yang flows start in the Dantian and move through Mingmen up the spine through the shoulders and into the fingers. And just like pushing or pulling a cart, a movement – even if it starts in the hand – is still guided by the centre (Dantian).

Within the upper body, the wrists and the arms should be gyrating, that is, doing circular moves, while the lower body, the ankles and the upper legs should rotate. In the same way the torso, the hip and the back move by rotation.

This is a little bit difficult to understand, but quite simple really. It means that the trunk, the hip, and the back turn in a certain way that suits them, that the legs, feet, and knees also rotate in a way appropriate for them, and the same goes for the hands and arms.

This turning, or rotating of the different body parts does not look the same; the spiral movements of the hips, for example, look a lot more inconspicuous than those of the arms. A beginner can only see on the arms and not the legs that one is moving within a spiral. And every sequence that builds on itself has its own spiral movement. But all of them are connected and result in only one.

While building up the movements across the three sections of the body, we should be careful about the spiralling connection within this space. The spiral connection begins in the legs, is centred in the hips and ends in the fingertips. If the practitioner feels uncomfortable during the single stances of the form, he is advised to correct the position of the legs and hips according to the movement for coordinating all sections of the body, so that the energy flow of spinning the silk (can si jin) can be created. In this way every mistake can be corrected.

When we give consideration to all the requirements of each individual body part in this way, it becomes an investigation into ourselves with the form as a vehicle. This implies a very exact examination of the subject matter and not simply a mindless replay of the form.

If we now pay attention to all requirements of each part of the body for reaching a full coordination of the entire body, then mastering the rhythm of every Reeling Silk exercise and the force resulting from it and its transfer into the form, is a way of resolving all conflicts that may occur therein. This method of self-correction of any mistake is used during the exercises of Taijiquan once we have mastered Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu.

Here we already find a hint on to how I can correct myself. At this level, however, nobody expects that I can actually do it.

During Level 1 of Taiji-Gong Fu, the student learns the various forms. After he has become familiar with them he can perceive the flow of internal energy inside the body. During this phase he may feel fascinated and motivated; each training session yields new impressions. After entering Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu he may feel that by and large he is no longer learning anything new. At the same time, he will misunderstand several very crucial aspects.

The danger at this point is that I cannot yet grasp the theory in all its depth or I consider it too superficially and therefore lose interest. I become inattentive to the teachings or the training because I believe that I already know all of it. This is a very big trap. This trap also catches trained teachers once they lose their 'beginner's mind'.

The student will not have mastered sufficiently these important points, and he will feel unskilled in his movements. Conversely, the student may execute the form in a very smooth and gentle way. He may also feel able to emanate quite an amount of force. However, he is not yet able to verify this during Pushing Hands. Some students then lose interest or lose confidence, so that they may give up their training.

The only way of reaching a level where enough force can be evolved, not too hard and not too soft, where matters can be consciously changed and applied, allowing one to move effectively yet with simplicity and ease, is the way of endurance and keeping strictly with the principle.

Here it is extremely important to simply continue – despite the apparent loss of prospect, simply continue. Trust and continue!

The student must practise the form in a very determined way so that the movements of the entire body align and coordinate. The result will be activity that can be released by one single small movement inside any part of the body. This way a complete and inherent system of movement is created.

There is a saying from the book by Chen Xin, *Taijiquan Tu Shuo*, which originated at the beginning of the last century, that goes:

If the principle is not clearly understood, consult a teacher. If the path is not clearly in sight, search for the help of a friend.

The teacher is there to solve the whole problem and, together with the student, clarify his personal difficulties. The clarification of difficulties with the help of a friend, however, is like therapy; it is help in a moment in which I need it, in which I need a talk and support.

This means that for the actual instruction subject matter, I should ask the teacher. For all the exchanges of opinions and personal ideas it is, however, better not to encumber the teacher too much and rather discuss it with fellow students and friends.

Chen Xin continues:

When both the principle and the method have been understood and training is done with persistence, success will in the end prevail.

So keep practising diligently, because:

It is said in the classical texts on Taijiquan that everyone can achieve the highest goal if only he keeps working hard enough on it, and that if the student will only persist, the highest success will suddenly materialize.

This 'suddenly' is an interesting word in this place, which is used quite often in Chen Xin's book. In the end nothing happens 'suddenly' without there being a pre-development.

Generally we can say that most people are able to reach Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu within four years. Someone who has reached a state of perceiving a gentle flow of Qi inside his body will suddenly begin to understand. The student at this point will be full of confidence and enthusiasm and will train with sheer joy. In some cases a strong urge may develop to practise more and more, and not to stop at all!

Now we are out of the woods. Now we practise because we want to and we do not have to force ourselves to the training hall every day. It is also becoming rarer that 'we don't have time to practise', because we do not allow ourselves to be distracted as much.

At the beginning of Level 2 the martial abilities are limited similarly to Level 1 of Taiji-Gong Fu. The skill isn't sufficient yet for real application.

An actual application would be, for example, an application in case of an emergency.

At the end of Level 2 and at the beginning of Level 3, martial ability will be achieved to a certain extent.

The next sequence deals with martial art abilities which should be established mid-way through Level 2. This will be described separately for the following levels.

Training of the Pushing Hands (tui shou) and practising Taijiquan (the forms) cannot be separated from each other. Whatever shortcuts or simplifications we might have allowed ourselves during form training will emerge as a weak point in Pushing Hands. This will in turn allow the opponent to take advantage over us. Therefore it must be borne in mind again and again that during training every single part of the body is interwoven and coordinated with the other. No unnecessary movements should be performed.

Level 2 of Taijiquan

During the Pushing Hands 'peng' (ward off), 'lu' (give way), 'ji' (press), and 'an' (push) should be executed with such a degree of precision that the upper and lower halves of the body work in harmony. That will make it very difficult for our opponent to attack.

This is interesting, and only advanced practitioners can really understand what it means; namely, why a body that is closed and coordinated within itself and moves as a whole is very difficult to attack. Comparing two people who hold the same body position and one of them has mastered this Taiji principle, he will be much harder to attack than the one who does not have this ability.

The question is why a body closed in itself is so difficult to attack, even though externally it looks to the layman exactly the same as a body not closed in itself. If one seriously ponders the question it becomes clear that this superiority has nothing to do with someone's ability, for example, to evade very well or to cover himself defensively. This is because this superiority comes from the internal martial skill, from the internal principles. This means: Use internal energy and not external force. Use your consciousness, and not brute force. The body/mind comes into an apparently superior state, which the opponent grasps intuitively. Therefore, he has the feeling that there is no opening for his attack; because there is no opening for him.

The proverb says: 'Regardless of how much force is exerted, I mobilize four ounces in order to deflect 1000 pounds.'

Without this foundation of body and mind this would be impossible to implement seriously.

Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu aims by way of correction of the single stances at achieving a gentle and continuous flow of Qi inside the body. Furthermore it aims at reaching a stage where the Qi inside the body permeates every single joint, as required by every single sequence.

This is yet again a higher demand. Joint locking techniques which are performed on us suddenly lose their effectiveness if we are successful at penetrating our joints and able to keep this connection during the attack. That does not mean that I resist. There simply is nothing to apply leverage to, because no point of pain can be reached and the substance is already so strong and flexible that it won't fracture.

This process of adjusting each movement necessarily involves the temporary use of unimportant or uncoordinated movements. Therefore it is not yet possible in this phase to apply martial skills during Pushing Hands in a controlled way.

That means we are still making too many mistakes, using too much or too little effort, we are still making too many unnecessary movements. We still have to pay attention to and spend time adjusting our body correctly. Therefore it is easy to miss the attack and difficult to seriously 'oppose' it.

Therefore we are also not yet able to successfully keep the force of the opponent away from our centre. A little bit too much or too little and the opponent once again reaches my centre.

As long as we are still ruled by our will, the movements can also not flow naturally. If I am still too hyper-active, I also make too many superfluous movements.

The opponent will focus on these weak points. He may either attempt to defeat the learner by exploiting the error or over-exertion, collapsing, falling down, or by the direct confrontation of force with force.

These shortcomings can therefore be exploited by the other.

During Pushing Hands the advancing opponent will leave no time for the learner to correct his movement fully. The opponent will exploit the weaknesses of the learner to attack and bring him off balance, or he will force him to retreat in order to avoid the force continuing head on. Should, however, the opponent

attack with less and more gentle force and altogether move more slowly, the learner may have time to readjust his body.

This kind of soft and slow action is, however, only possible in a friendly situation. In real-life circumstances I cannot assume that the opponent will move so slowly and softly that I can deal with it. In the regulated situations in which you meet your friends and experiment, you can develop a certain level of skill, which, however, will not hold up to more demanding pressure.

So, once again:

Should, however, the opponent attack with less and more gentle force and altogether move more slowly, the learner may have time to readjust his body. This way he may perhaps be able to ward off the attack in a more satisfactory way. In terms of the discussion above, it is not possible within Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu to perform either an attack or a defence without greater effort. On this level it is often an advantage to be the first to start an attack. The person forced to react will be in a less favourable situation.

The well-known phrase: 'Attack is the best form of defence' is quite accurate for Level 1 and most of Level 2 as well. However, it no longer applies to the subsequent levels. In those the attacker is automatically at a disadvantage.

On this level one is not able yet to 'forget about oneself' or to match the opponent's moves. No advantage can be gained from the opponent's moves, as one is not able to adapt to the changes and to follow them.

One cannot take advantage of the opponent's attack, and it is still difficult to deal successfully with an attack. Therefore it is better to attack yourself during the first two levels.

While being able to dodge or to ward off an attack, one will still easily commit mistakes, such as falling down or collapsing, overstraining or resisting the force.

The Five Levels of Taijiquan

For all these reasons, the student is not yet capable of acting during the Pushing Hands in accordance with the principle of 'peng', 'lu', 'ji', and 'an'. A person who has entered this level is characterized as 20 per cent Yin and 80 per cent Yang. This is described as 'a new and undisciplined hand'.

'A new and undisciplined hand.' Some things have already changed, one can already do a few things. But the skill is not yet enough to control the situation in a fight. Therefore the hand is 'new', but 'undisciplined'.



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang

Level 3
of Taijiquan

第三
層
功
夫

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

第三层功夫

“要想拳练好，必把圈练小”。练习陈式太极拳的步骤，即由大圈到中圈，由中圈到小圈，由小圈而无圈。所谓“圈”并非指手脚运行的轨迹，而指内气疏通。第三层功夫是由大圈而至中圈的阶段。

拳论中说“意气君来骨肉臣”，即练习太极拳时要着重用意。在第一层功夫中，思想注意力主要集中在学习和掌握太极拳的外形姿势，第二层功夫时注意力主要是发现运动中身手内外产生的矛盾，调整身法，达到内气贯通。进入第三层功夫，已经疏通了内气，要求用意不用力，动作轻而不浮，沉而不僵，即外柔内刚，柔中寓刚，周身相随，禁忌妄动。但不可只顾想气在体内如何运行，而忽视动作，否则，就会产生神态呆滞，致使气不仅不能畅通，反而会造成气势涣散的病象。所以说“在神不在气，在气则滞”。

在第一层和第二层功夫中，虽已掌握了外形动作，但内外尚未合一。有时应该吸气，由于动作僵滞，吸不满；应该呼气，由于内外不合，呼不净。所以，练拳时要求自然呼吸。而进入第三层功夫，动作比较协调，内外基本上合一，一般的动作与呼吸能自然准确地配合，但对一些比较细致、复杂、疾速的动作，还需有意识地注意与呼吸的配合，进一步使动作与呼吸协调一致，逐步达到顺其自然。

第三层功夫基本掌握了陈式太极拳内外要求和运动规律，有了自我纠正的能力，动作比较自如，内气比较充足。这时需进一步了解拳势的技击含义和使用方法，要多练推手，检验拳架、内劲和发劲，以及化劲的质量。如拳架能适应对抗性的推手，则证明掌握了拳架要领，进一步下功夫就会更加充满信心。这时可加大运动量，增加一些辅助练习，如抖大杆子，以及刀、枪、剑、棍等器械和单势发劲，这样练习两年时间，一般即可进入第四层功夫。

第三层功夫虽然内气贯通，动作比较协调，在不受外界干扰，自己练习的情况下，内外也能够合一，但内气还是比较薄弱，肌肉的活动与内脏器官之间建立的协调关系还不够稳固。因此，在对抗性推手和技击时，遇到一般比较轻缓的进攻能够舍己从人，随机应变，因势利导，引进落空，避实击虚，运化自如。而一遇劲敌，就会感到掎劲不足，有欲将身法压匾之意（有可能要破坏不倚不偏、八面支撑、立于不败之地的身法），尚不能随心所欲，亦不能如拳论中所说的那样“出手不见手，见手不能走”。引进和发出对方，也往往生硬和勉强。所以说：“三阴七阳犹觉硬”。

TRANSLATION

'If your boxing skills are to achieve quality, you must learn to make the circles smaller!'

The single steps in practising Taijiquan include progressing from mastering large circles to medium circles, and from there to small circles. The term 'circle' in this respect does not describe the path of the single body parts movements, but the gentle flow of internal energy, Qi. In this sense, at Level 3 one should begin with large circles, and conclude with medium circles (the circulation of energy).

The classical texts of Taijiquan say that Yi, the awareness, and Qi deserve higher regard than the forms. This means that while practising the forms one should pay great attention to the awareness. Within Level 1, awareness is focused on learning and mastering the outer form sequences of Taijiquan.

During Level 2 the awareness is focused chiefly on revealing blockages and inconsistent internal and external movements and sequences of the single body sections. One should adjust the body and the form sequences to each other in order to create a free internal flow of energy.

By the time we enter Level 3 of Taiji-Gong Fu, we should be able to create this flow of energy. The goal is true awareness and not brute force. The movements should be easy without being 'spongy', heavy without being ponderous.

This means that the movements should appear gentle, but with their internal energy being strong. A strong force has been created within the gentle movements. The entire body should be very coordinated within, and there should be no more incorrect movements.

One should not dedicate one's attention exclusively to the flow of internal energy while neglecting external movements, otherwise one may end up in confusion, and the flow of internal energy is not only retracted and disturbed, it may even dissolve. That's why the classical texts state: 'Awareness should be focused on the spirit and not only upon the Qi.' If we concentrate too much on the Qi, stagnation will be the result. Within Level 1 and Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu, one will

have mastered the external sequences of the form, but not the coordination between internal and external movement. Sometimes rigidity or stagnation in our movements will make it impossible for us to inhale fully. In the same way it may not be possible to exhale the breath completely without a proper coordination between internal and external movements. While practising the form one should therefore breathe in an entirely natural way. By the beginning of Level 3 we have achieved a better coordination, however, between the internal and the external movements. Generally we are able to synchronize movement very precisely with breathing.

Conscious synchronization of movements with breathing is important for performing several more refined, more complicated and faster movements properly. This is necessary in order to achieve naturalness gradually, by synchronizing respiration and movement in the course of continuing progress. Level 3 of Taiji-Gong Fu mainly deals with mastering the internal and external requirements of Chen Taijiquan as well as with the rhythm of the single exercises. Moreover, the student here attains the option of correcting himself. He learns to perform the movements with even more simplicity and gains a clear increase of internal energy. At this point a deeper understanding of the martial contents of the system becomes necessary, particularly in relation to the application-related aspects of the various form elements. Therefore one should practise Pushing Hands, check the single form elements for this, and learn both the discharge and the dissolving of energy. When the form has reached a quality of being able to withstand a frontal push, one will have mastered the necessary elementary aspects. At this point the student will gain more and more confidence if he keeps practising hard. This usually results in a spontaneous increase in the number of forms being practised day by day, and the exercises become refined, for instance by the use of a three-metre-long staff, or a sword, sabre, long-pole or spear, or by learning about explosive force (*fajin*).

By training in a hard-working mode as described here for about two more years, reaching Level 4 of Taiji-Gong Fu comes into sight. Within Level 3 single movements are more coordinated and the internal energy is flowing with much less friction, but it is still rather weak, and the coordination

Level 3 of Taijiquan

between movement and the function of the internal organs is not yet adequately achieved. By practising alone without being distracted, one should be able to achieve internal and external coordination. Confronted with a punch or during combat, it may be possible to keep up with an attacker's action and effect a change if his force is rather soft and slow. The learner should use any opportunity to bring his assailant into an unfavourable situation. He should avoid confrontation with a strong move from the attacker, but counterattack him if there is a weak point. It is recommended to control this gently.

Being on this level and encountering an opponent who is stronger may cause the learner to find that his force of 'peng', of warding off, is still insufficient. It feels as if our position is pressed in or collapsing. The stance is not yet the way it should be: permanently centred and invincible due to its roundness. In this situation we cannot manoeuvre our body in the way we would wish. The student doesn't yet have at hand the principle described in the classical texts: 'Strike with your hands without allowing them to be seen. Once they do become visible, nothing more can be done about it.'

Giving way or throwing off still requires too much effort. The body is still too rigid. This condition is described as 30 per cent Yin and 70 per cent Yang; still the hard prevails too much.



Master Jan Silberstorff

COMMENTARY

'If your boxing skills are to achieve quality, you must learn to make the circles smaller!'

The single steps in practising Taijiquan include progressing from mastering large circles to medium circles, and from there to small circles. The term 'circle' in this respect does not describe the path of the single body parts movements, but the gentle flow of internal energy, Qi.

The circles become smaller – not externally in the postures such as 'Single Whip' or 'White Crane', but in the internal movements the internal circles and spiral movements become smaller. The energy condenses more and more and becomes more subtle. The transmissions become shorter and less complicated.

In this sense, at Level 3 one should begin with large circles, and conclude with medium circles (the circulation of energy).

This means that now, at the latest, we seriously began to examine the true energetic circulations.

The classical texts of Taijiquan say that Yi, the awareness, and Qi deserve higher regard than the forms. This means that while practising the forms one should pay great attention to the awareness.

In the beginning one works more externally and is occupied with the flow of the postures. With continued practice of the form this becomes clearer, and after a while one does not need to think about the sequencing of the postures anymore.

Once one does not need to think about the sequencing of the form, and the basic structural mistakes of each movement have been eliminated, one can devote oneself to the spiritual aspect of the form: The deliberate guidance of energy, which in turn results in deliberate movement. In the beginning one moves and uses this external movement to initiate a certain energetic circulation

or energy flow. Once this is achieved, the process can slowly be reversed. One no longer moves from the outside to the inside, but from the inside to the outside. Now mindfulness is the beginning and the deepest root of all movement. Everything follows it. Therefore it is written in 'nei san he': 'Mindfulness guides the (internal) energy, the (internal) energy guides the (external) movement.' An old classic also states: 'Yi dao, Qi dao': 'When mindfulness has arrived, (internal) energy has also arrived.' Therefore it is of great importance at this level to understand what is meant with the terms 'Yi' and 'Qi', because their quality is decisive for all that follows.

Within Level 1, awareness is focused on learning and mastering the outer form sequences of Taijiquan.

During Level 2 the awareness is focused chiefly on revealing blockages and inconsistent internal and external movements and sequences of the single body sections. One should adjust the body and the form sequences to each other in order to create a free internal flow of energy.

By the time we enter Level 3 of Taiji-Gong Fu, we should be able to create this flow of energy. The goal is true awareness and not brute force.

Now the spiritual quality becomes more important.

The movements should be easy without being 'spongy', heavy without being ponderous.

This means that the movements should appear gentle, but with their internal energy being strong. A strong force has been created within the gentle movements. The entire body should be very coordinated within, and there should be no more incorrect movements.

This means that now only authentic movements should be happening. All the mistakes that have been mentioned previously should no longer appear. If, however, someone still has these 'improper movements', he must inevitably fail on the higher levels, because his movements do not show the necessary efficiency.

One should not dedicate one's attention exclusively to the flow of internal energy while neglecting external movements, otherwise one may end up in confusion, and the flow of internal energy is not only retracted and disturbed, it may even dissolve. That's why the classical texts state: 'Awareness should be focused on the spirit and not only upon the Qi.' If we concentrate too much on the Qi, stagnation will be the result.

For many it is not clear why they should not concentrate too much on the Qi. Again and again we must think of the silk threads which tear and stick to one another easily, because they represent a very subtle guidance of energy. Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang always says: 'Half thinking, half not thinking – half thinking, half feeling.' Here we get the message which we are already familiar with from Level 1: Do not attempt anything too doggedly, learning takes time, do not force anything. But there is also a deeper message. After the end of the stage in which we understand that consciousness guides energy through the body and initiates movement by means of mindfulness, the process begins in which consciousness arises within the movement, immerses within it.

The same goes for the gaze; the gaze, simplified, as the realization of spirit. The gaze indeed guides the movement, but it does not stare ahead of it. It leads the movement, but at the same time also arises in it. Or the other way around, the gaze flows with the movement, despite simultaneously leading it. Likewise for consciousness: it leads the energy, but at the same time arises in it. This prevents us from concentrating too much on Qi itself. Too intense concentration creates tension. This interferes with the flow and the energy gets blocked, or stagnates. 'Yi dao, Qi dao' means that when consciousness arrives, energy also arrives. Thus consciousness leads energy, or energy follows consciousness. Yet at a high level both happen simultaneously. If, however, the consciousness concentrates too much on Qi itself, there is no progress. Both, consciousness and Qi, stay in the same place. Therefore stagnation results.

This is the reason why consciousness should not concentrate too much on Qi. Actually, consciousness must not stay in one

Level 3 of Taijiquan

place. It must always be flowing, otherwise it will attach itself and then can no longer adapt spontaneously to a changed situation. If the body is free of blockages and connected in itself, the energy can freely follow mindfulness. Therefore mindfulness is aimed at the spirit. Spirit moves freely and the energy is present without exception.

Within Level 1 and Level 2 of Taiji-Gong Fu, one will have mastered the external sequences of the form, but not the coordination between internal and external movement.

At this stage in Level 3 we have internal and external movement. In the beginning we only had external movement. Then we created internal and external movement. Now there is a new demand, to coordinate these two movements. Previously it was only about coordination of hip and shoulder, as well as legs, hip, and arms.

Then suddenly there was a new quality, namely an internal movement, which we did not have before, or at least were not aware of. Now we have something new to coordinate, the internal and external movements. One aspect of this is described in the 'nei san he' with 'Qi yu li he': Internal energy and external force connect, and internal energy initiates external force.

Sometimes rigidity or stagnation in our movements will make it impossible for us to inhale fully. In the same way it may not be possible to exhale the breath completely without a proper coordination between internal and external movements. While practising the form one should therefore breathe in an entirely natural way.

Especially in Chen style we say on the question of breathing: 'Forget about the breath; especially because breathing is so important, forget about it.' The breath is regulated through the structure of the body. If I am in the wrong stance, I cannot perform abdominal breathing, and if I am positioned in the correct structure, the breath will flow deeply all by itself. We said: do not yet concentrate on breathing because it leads to stagnation. However, now we have

reached a certain level of naturalness and have attained a certain level of Gong Fu. Now it becomes interesting to pay attention to the breath. If this is attempted at an earlier level, it will lead to stagnation. Because, if you try to coordinate the breath with the movement but are not yet able to perform the movement accurately, the arranged breathing cannot work. It could lead to shortness of breath or a limitation of the flow of the breath. If I artificially coordinate movement and breath using my will power at sea level and feel good with it, and suddenly I practise the same thing at an altitude of 3000 metres, everything will collapse. This occurs because the oxygen content of the air is significantly decreased at this altitude; so, suddenly the coordination does not work anymore, because the breath is not natural, but artificial. The same breathing in the same movement sequences, but now in much thinner air; now we don't get enough oxygen. Likewise the body will sometimes need more or fewer cycles of breath for a movement, depending on the day and the constitution of the body. A constant arrangement between breathing and movement does not do this justice. These examples are meant to show how limited it is to harmonize breath and movement artificially by means of one's own inadequate imagination, if the overall context does not fit. Therefore it makes sense, for a long time, to let breathing just happen naturally, according to the motto: 'The body takes what it needs.' Through the improvement of movement it is possible that the breath will naturally adjust itself to movement. For this it is true that the better my stance, and the more relaxed I am, the deeper the breath can sink. After a certain level, namely Level 3, it becomes interesting to work consciously with the breath, to involve the breath. Of course, at this point we will already generally have developed our breath in a natural way. This is due to the above-mentioned connection between correct body condition and correct breathing. Only in some portions of difficult movements a finer adjustment of the breath may still be necessary.

By the beginning of Level 3 we have achieved a better coordination, however, between the internal and the external

movements. Generally we are able to synchronize movement very precisely with breathing.

Here is written that now the movements can be coordinated very well with the breath. At this point it does not say that we are actually doing it!

This describes a natural process. However, when I reach the point of being able to guide the breath consciously, it becomes superfluous, except for a few details, which are mentioned in the following sentence.

(Now in Level 3) Conscious synchronization of movements with breathing is important for performing several more refined, more complicated and faster movements properly. This is necessary in order to achieve naturalness gradually, by synchronizing respiration and movement in the course of continuing progress.

Now suddenly this refers to an active process, to be able to execute some subtle, more complicated and faster movements well. This means: Overall the breath adjusts to the movement and the movement to the breath. This occurs in a natural way. We correct the breath by correcting the body. Therefore Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang says: 'Wrong body position and correct breathing = two mistakes, because the breath does not go with the body position. Wrong body position and wrong breath = only one mistake, because at least now the breath fits to the body position.'

If I am tense and/or leaning, and I try to inhale deep into the belly, it does not really work, because I am tense and forcing myself to do something that cannot happen. If, however, I am just as tense and standing in a lean, but I inhale shallowly into my chest, it perfectly fits my body position. Therefore I am now only committing one mistake.

When I am positioned correctly, the breath will naturally flow deeply; because now the space is available for this to occur. The breath now has the opportunity to flow deep, and follows its own nature.

'Xinjia', meaning 'New frame', describes a variation of the form which uses even more spiralic and complex movements than the original variation of the 'Old frame' or 'Laojia'.

Of course, on a higher level there are certain movements, for example, in the Xinjia form, which are very subtle and spiralic.

At Level 3 it can be helpful to feel consciously into the synchronization of movement and breath and to coordinate them. This includes, among others, explosive movements. Once this is mastered, one once again lets movement and breath handle synchronization themselves, so that they can become natural. It is important to understand that I can only recognize degrees of naturalness once I find myself within it. That means, prior to that I do not know them. Therefore I can only bring myself to a state in which nature can flow into me. I myself cannot create this naturalness. Therefore it is said:

This is necessary in order to achieve naturalness gradually, by synchronizing respiration and movement in the course of continuing progress.

'Wu wei', 'not acting', describes a Daoist concept of non-interference within an internal process or an external event. It also relates to a deeper concept of spontaneous action.

I must understand when it is better to actively interfere, and when it is better not to do so. Here we recognize the concept of 'wu wei'.

Level 3 of Taiji-Gong Fu mainly deals with mastering the internal and external requirements of Chen Taijiquan as well as with the rhythm of the single exercises. Moreover, the student here attains the option of correcting himself. He learns to perform the movements with even more simplicity and gains a clear increase of internal energy.

Level 3 of Taijiquan

This self-correction was already implied at the end of Level 2; during Level 3 it is learned; and at Level 4 one has mastered it.

At this point a deeper understanding of the martial contents of the system becomes necessary, particularly in relation to the application-related aspects of the various form elements. Therefore one should practise Pushing Hands, check the single form elements for this, and learn both the discharge and the dissolving of energy.

The dissolution of energy refers to dissolving the energy of the opponent.

When the form has reached a quality of being able to withstand a frontal push, one will have mastered the necessary elementary aspects.

Now I am able to withstand even these large, aggressive forces.

At this point the student will gain more and more confidence if he keeps practising hard. This usually results in a spontaneous increase in the number of forms being practised day by day, and the exercises become refined, for instance by the use of a three-metre-long staff, or a sword, sabre, long-pole or spear, or by learning about explosive force (fajin).

Again I should emphasize that this is the classical view of training. Here, the sabre is only added to the program after most of us have moved on to other things. As mentioned previously, we should bear in mind that when the teacher–student relationship is 1:1, when we live together and from morning to evening have nothing else to do but to practise, one can reach Level 3 after about seven years, which for us normal mortal beings, I will simply say, might be the case after 35 years. Therefore we are allowed to start sword practice after only three months. Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang always says: ‘First the teacher follows the student, then the student follows the teacher.’ In the beginning the student does not understand all that he got himself into, but has certain preconceived notions. And to

help him, the teacher comes to meet him half-way and lets him have his wishes. Inside the teacher knows that the student will not progress by learning a lot of different things. But it gives the student joy, and so he will occupy himself with the material and finally come to a point at which real interest is generated. Suddenly he understands what it is all about, and knows that what he is doing, which is Taijiquan, is what he really wants to do. This is the turning point, and now the student follows the teacher. Now the teacher no longer approaches his student so politely and lets him practise all kinds of forms. Now the serious, patient work begins: for example, remaining a long time in standing meditation, and the corrections thereof.

In the beginning it is good to come to meet the student and his ideas and to encourage his joy and interest in the subject; very much like practising Taijiquan with small children. You cannot ask children to stay in standing meditation for an hour right away. You have to inspire them. And then, when this inspiration is there, and has become a habit, that is the time when the entertainment factor can be reduced, and the real, important, and effective content can be taught. Now one is certain that the student will persevere; before that point, he will just quit.

By training in a hard-working mode as described here for about two more years, reaching Level 4 of Taiji-Gong Fu comes into sight. Within Level 3 single movements are more coordinated and the internal energy is flowing with much less friction, but it is still rather weak, and the coordination between movement and the function of the internal organs is not yet adequately achieved. By practising alone without being distracted, one should be able to achieve internal and external coordination.

Here we have reached a point, for which the Chen family has a tradition described, according to Chen Xing, as 'Do not make the slightest noise in the garden for three years.' This means that one withdraws for a long time from public life in order to be able to dedicate oneself exclusively to training.

Confronted with a punch or during combat, it may be possible to keep up with an attacker's action and effect a change if his force is rather soft and slow. The learner should use any opportunity to bring his assailant into an unfavourable situation. He should avoid confrontation with a strong move from the attacker, but counterattack him if there is a weak point. It is recommended to control this gently.

Being on this level and encountering an opponent who is stronger may cause the learner to find that his force of 'peng', of warding off, is still insufficient. It feels as if our position is pressed in or collapsing. The stance is not yet the way it should be: permanently centred and invincible due to its roundness. In this situation we cannot manoeuvre our body in the way we would wish. The student doesn't yet have at hand the principle described in the classical texts: 'Strike with your hands without allowing them to be seen. Once they do become visible, nothing more can be done about it.'

This describes an ability that has nothing to do with speed. It is not about, when hitting fast, hitting so fast that the opponent does not see it. But it is about an absolute powerlessness of the opponent. I punch him and he cannot do anything against it. That is because he does not see and understand what I am doing. And at the moment when he does comprehend it, it is too late. It is a sentence with a lot of content – and assumes a very high level.

'Strike with your hands without allowing them to be seen. Once they do become visible, nothing more can be done about it.'

I approach the opponent and he does not understand. He does not see and cannot follow on any level and is completely disoriented. It is a very uncomfortable feeling of helplessness, of complete desperation.

Giving way or throwing off still requires too much effort. The body is still too rigid. This condition is described as 30 per cent Yin and 70 per cent Yang; still the hard prevails too much.

The Five Levels of Taijiquan



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang



Master Jan Silberstorff

Level 4
of Taijiquan
屋
功
夫

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

第四层功夫

第四层功夫是由中圈而至小圈阶段,功夫已显高深造诣,接近成功。对具体练习的方法、动作要领、逐势的技击含意、内气运行,以及注意事项、呼吸与动作的配合等,都已完全

捋。但练习中还应注意,伸手迈步都需有临敌之意,即假设周围都是敌人。一招一势,要连绵贯串、周身相随,承上启下皆有中气收放、宰乎其中,练拳时“无人如有人”。真正遇敌交战,要做到胆愈大,心愈细,“有人如无人”。其练习内容(如拳、器械等)与第三层功夫相同,只要坚持不懈,一般三年时间即可进入五层功夫。

第四层功夫在技击方面与第三层功夫差别很大。第三层功夫是化掉对方进攻的力,解除本身的矛盾,使自己主动对方被动,而第四层功夫则可以连化带发。其原因是,内劲已经非常充足,意气换得灵,周身组成的体系比较巩固。因此在推手时,对方的进攻威胁不大,触着即变换身法,很容易地将其来力化掉,表现出随人之动而不断改变方向,不丢不顶,内部调整,处处意在人先,动作小,发劲干脆,落点准,威力大的特点。所以说“四阴六阳类好手”。

TRANSLATION

At Level 4 the progression from medium to small spiral movements should be mastered. This is the stage where we are nearing accomplishment, and this success is a very high level in Gong Fu. By now the effective training methods should have been mastered. The really important requirements of the forms should be understood and ready to be performed. One should have understood all the applications and martial concepts concealed within the movements. The flow of Qi inside the body should be 'smoothed out'. Every move should be harmonized with breathing. Every movement during the form should now be connected with the idea of an attacking opponent. Or, one should imagine being surrounded by a multitude of attackers. Every move within the forms should be

performed in a steadily continuing mode, so that each stance and each section of the body are linked with each other at any time, so that the whole body will move as one. The movements of the upper and the lower body are related to each other, so that a continuous flow of energy exists between them. This flow is controlled from the waist.

One should execute the form 'as if I was facing an opponent, though in fact no one is there'. Then, if confronted by a real attacker, we should be calm, yet stay aware: 'as if no one was there, though the opponent is standing in front of me'.

The training content of the forms resembles that of Level 3. Theoretically Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu can be achieved from here within about another three years.

In the martial abilities there is a considerable difference between Level 3 and Level 4. Level 3 aims at dissolving the opponent's force and avoiding conflicts that may arise within one's own movements. This involves taking an active role and forcing the opponent into passivity. Level 4 not only enables the student to dissolve the opponent's force, but in addition gives him the ability to execute a targeted emission of force. By now the student has enough internal energy, and he is able to change and to adapt to the situation using energy and awareness while remaining flexible. Within the space of his movements the body now forms an integrated system. That's why the opponent's attack no longer poses a major threat. Once in contact with the opponent, the student won't have any trouble in changing along with the impact, thereby dissolving with ease the force that's targeting him. While perceiving the specific direction of the opponent's force, it becomes possible to follow it and to keep changing, so that any opposing action can be countered. The student is now capable of emitting the proper amount of force, as well as continuously re-adjusting himself. He can predict the opponent's intention while acting calmly himself and precisely adjusting his own force. This allows him to hit the opponent in the most precise way.

Thus a person with these capabilities is described as 40 per cent Yin and 60 per cent Yang. This indicates being good at performing Taijiquan.

COMMENTARY

At Level 4 the progression from medium to small spiral movements should be mastered. This is the stage where we are nearing accomplishment, and this success is a very high level in Gong Fu. By now the effective training methods should have been mastered. The really important requirements of the forms should be understood and ready to be performed. One should have understood all the applications and martial concepts concealed within the movements. The flow of Qi inside the body should be 'smoothed out'. Every move should be harmonised with breathing. Every movement during the form should now be connected with the idea of an attacking opponent.

When practising the forms, do not think about the applications, but concentrate on the basic principles: body direction, on internal energy work, on the essential.

Level 4 is a level in which I already have mastered all this. At Level 1 I have to concentrate on the sequence and the exercise of the form. Once I have internalized this, I become free to deal with the principles of 'wei san he' and 'nei san he'. Once I have internalized these, I become free to delve deeper into the internal energy flows. Once I have mastered this, I once again become free, and now it is shadow boxing. Now I imagine an opponent – not before. It takes time to get to this point; everything takes its time and everything has its level. And we are reminded of the beginning: 'If you cannot accept this and think you can take a shortcut, you will not be successful.' That means one has to go step by step: elementary school – middle school – university. There is no shortcut because this is exactly the shortcut or the passing lane; there is no other.

Many beginners are of the opinion that they would understand a movement better if they only knew the application. Often times, however, the opposite is true. The imagined application keeps the mind always on an external, superficial level. Thus the mind does not have the opportunity to sink into the deeper levels. Because the body follows the mind, this is also visible in the body. The body also cannot reach a deeper level. Because an application at this

Level 4 of Taijiquan

point has hardly any effect, the martial use can also be disregarded. The imagination would rather lead the body to tense up due to the mind's effort of imagination and become distorted (according to the imagined application). In addition, every movement has many different applications. What should the mind do? Imagine one application on Mondays, another on Tuesdays, and yet a third on Wednesdays, during practice?

At Level 4, however, one has reached a greater depth. Now it makes sense to attend to the applications; however, not concretely, or with precise applications, but rather within a scheme, because a real application happens spontaneously out of the nature of the situation and does not come through the mind.

Every movement during the form should now be connected with the idea of an attacking opponent. Or, one should imagine being surrounded by a multitude of attackers.

Here also we would limit our spontaneous opportunities too much if we were to restrict our body/mind as a result of too definite ideas about application within the forms sequence. Therefore we should imagine our attacker only like a shadow and not visualize the technical aspect of the 'combat situation' in too concrete a way.

Every move within the forms should be performed in a steadily continuing mode, so that each stance and each section of the body are linked with each other at any time, so that the whole body will move as one. The movements of the upper and the lower body are related to each other, so that a continuous flow of energy exists between them. This flow is controlled from the waist.

And now a very beautiful classical phrase:

One should execute the form 'as if I was facing an opponent, though in fact no one is there'. Then, if confronted by a real attacker, we should be calm, yet stay aware: 'as if no one was there, though the opponent is standing in front of me'.

That means, while practising the form I imagine the proximity of opponents. If someone is really there, I act as though nobody is present. This is a very important concept for a real situation, because it can assure our absolute superiority. It means that I visualize a conflict with an imaginary opponent within a particular framework in the forms training. In a real situation, however, I cannot respect my opponent as a 'fighter'. This means, I have to do away with this situation right away, I have to render the opponent harmless immediately. If I respect the opponent as an 'opponent', I may even start to fight with him. This again implies that I would give him space to develop himself. The sentence: 'The opponent does not move, I do not move. The opponent moves, I am already there,' means precisely not to give him that space. If there is no attack, I do not need to do anything. If, however, there is an attack, I stop the fight before it even started. This mindset gives me the necessary calmness and alertness which I need in such a situation.

The training content of the forms resembles that of Level 3. Theoretically Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu can be achieved from here within about another three years.

In the martial abilities there is a considerable difference between Level 3 and Level 4. Level 3 aims at dissolving the opponent's force and avoiding conflicts that may arise within one's own movements.

'Dissolving' does not mean to block or to evade the force of the opponent. Dissolving truly means to stagnate or dissolve the opponent's forces by means of contact, so that they do not affect me anymore. There is a movement, and by means of the contact, the force of the movement which is aimed at me dissolves. It is as if I am driving a car towards a traffic jam on the freeway, but the closer I come, the more the traffic jam dissolves of its own accord. Through the contact certain moments of relaxation are created in me which unpick the incoming force. This causes the force to disperse into many directions, and each individual one is no longer strong enough to show any effect. For this, however, we need the quality of the medium to small circles, because otherwise I cannot change fast enough, especially with a strong and fast push. If the circles are still

too big it cannot happen spontaneously enough, and not in the here and now of the situation. Or, simply put: 'I will be too late.'

We notice the importance of naturalness. Because my mind is already too coarse and slow for such a process, I have to leave this 'reaction' to my intuitive ability to change, meaning my own inner nature. An intervention bound by the mind would only be a hindrance.

This should be mastered in Level 3.

Taijiquan, even practised as a martial art, has 95 per cent to do with myself and not with the opponent. One never fails because of the other, one only fails because of oneself. When I do not get anywhere with someone else – and the same goes for social situations – I build more and more tension in myself. I want to push somebody, but I am not able to. Thus I become harder as I try to push against him. But that is not the fault of the opponent, and instead I create more and more tension within myself, which no longer has any effect on the opponent. In our social life we can see the same principle. I do not advance with my arguments, so I start to shout. But that doesn't make the arguments any better.

The same goes for Taijiquan: I do not collapse because of the other, I collapse because of myself; because I lose my own centre. This means, instead of continuously running against it, I rather try to correct myself, so that I stay centered even in the face of this increased demand. Then I neither need to shout, nor let this energy stagnate. Thus, by releasing slightly I can suddenly find ways to more subtle levels in which I can flow through my opponent.

This is how the soft defeats the hard.

I have to work hard during forms practice to gain the ability to dissolve such obstacles. Therefore Pushing Hands training is rather a test of what I have developed already. It is more experimentation, but not the primary medium in which I learn this ability.

Level 3 aims at dissolving the opponent's force and avoiding conflicts that may arise within one's own movements. This involves taking an active role and forcing the opponent into passivity.

Everywhere I am touched, the action of the other dissolves. Nothing remains for him, he cannot do anything. This means he slides into passivity and I am actively able to control him.

Level 4 not only enables the student to dissolve the opponent's force, but in addition gives him the ability to execute a targeted emission of force. By now the student has enough internal energy, and he is able to change and to adapt to the situation using energy and awareness while remaining flexible. Within the space of his movements the body now forms an integrated system. That's why the opponent's attack no longer poses a major threat. Once in contact with the opponent, the student won't have any trouble in changing along with the impact, thereby dissolving with ease the force that's targeting him. While perceiving the specific direction of the opponent's force, it becomes possible to follow it and to keep changing, so that any opposing action can be countered. The student is now capable of emitting the proper amount of force, as well as continuously re-adjusting himself.

This is important: to be able to discharge the right amount of force. Everyone can discharge force, even without training. But here we are talking about the true force, as we call it so nicely in Taijiquan. The true energy, the right force – 'as well as continuously re-adjusting himself'. This means to be able to adapt to all possible changes, and regardless of what the opponent does or what I do, I will not lose my structure or my centre. It signifies that I have a very stable centre, but that at the same time I can adapt to all possible external positions. Nothing external can destroy my centre; even if I cannot hold up to the force, I am still able to correct my centre anew. Because I adapt to the change and position myself into new places, the force does not reach me. To discharge the 'right' force as well as correct oneself also means to give the force the decisive moment, the decisive direction and the decisive quality.

He can predict the opponent's intention while acting calmly himself and precisely adjusting his own force. This allows him to hit the opponent in the most precise way.

Thus a person with these capabilities is described as 40 per cent Yin and 60 per cent Yang. This indicates being good at performing Taijiquan.

Level 5
of Taijiquan

五
層
功
夫

CHINESE ORIGINAL TEXT

第五层功夫

第五层功夫是由小圈而至无圈，有形归无迹阶段。拳论中说：“一气运来志无停，乾坤正气运鸿蒙，运到有形归无迹，方知玄妙在天工”。第五层功夫期间，动作已经非常活顺，内劲十分充足。但需要精益求精，仍然是费一日之功力，即可得一日之成效，直至身体空灵，变化无端，内有虚实变换，外面看不见，这才是完成了第五层功夫。

在技击方面达到刚柔相济，松活弹抖，周身处处皆太极。一动一静俱浑然。即身体各部位都相当灵敏，周身无处不传手，挨着何处何处击，蓄发相变，八面支撑。所以说：“惟有五阴并五阳，阴阳不偏称妙手，妙手一运一太极，太极一运化乌有”。

总之，完成第五层功夫，大脑皮层中兴奋与抑制、肌肉收缩与放松、肌肉的活动与内脏器官的活动已建立了巩固的协调关系，即偶然受到袭击，也不易使这种协调动作受到破坏，而能随机应变。但是还应继续深造，精益求精。

科学发展是永无止境的，太极拳的锻炼也是如此，终身不可尽其妙。



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang

TRANSLATION

Level 5 is the stage of proceeding from small circular movements to circular movements that are no longer visible, where one proceeds from mastering the form to 'invisible' execution.

The classical texts of Taijiquan say: 'With the gentle flow of energy, with the cosmic energy, one's own internal Qi moves in a natural way. Moved by a solid form all the way through to the invisible. So one realizes how marvellous the natural is.' The movements should by now be flexible and gentle. There should be sufficient internal energy.

Yet no matter how far the student may have advanced, it remains important to keep striving for the best. It is absolutely necessary to work hard day after day to achieve a flexible and adaptable body capable of manifold changes. The body should be fit to change internally and to distinguish between what's essential and what is not. This should be invisible from the outside.

Only then has Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu been reached. In terms of martial skills the hard (gang) should accomplish the soft (rou). The form should be relaxed, dynamic, elastic and lively. Every move and every moment of no emotion is consistent with the principle of Taijiquan. Every movement is launched from the entire body without any break. This means that every part of the body should be very sensitive and able to act immediately whenever necessary. This should reach the degree where every part of the body is capable of attacking like a fist whenever in contact with the opponent. The deliberate emission of power and preservation of it should also be constantly alternating. The stance should be firm, as if supported on all sides.

Therefore this level is described as: 'The only person capable of playing with Yin and Yang without being biased by either of the two.' A person holding this degree of skill is considered a good master. A good master will make any movement consistent with the Taiji principle which means that (the actual) movement has become invisible.

Having brought Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu to perfection means that a strong connection and coordination between the spirit, the contraction and relaxation of the muscles, their

movements, and the functions of the internal organs has been established, one that will not be constricted or derailed even by a sudden and strong attack. Instead we remain flexible and agile.

However, even when we have reached this point, we should keep training continuously in order to reach new levels further beyond. Science aims beyond given limits. So does the science of Taijiquan: a whole lifetime is not enough to realize in entirety all the beauty and the power of Taijiquan.

COMMENTARY

Level 5 is the stage of proceeding from small circular movements to circular movements that are no longer visible.

Many people have asked me again and again: 'Yes, round movements, but what about straight movements?' And I have always answered that there is no such thing as straight movements; there are only round movements while we are doing something that appears like a straight movement. The emphasis is on 'appears', because the circular movements become so small that they appear straight again. In the beginning the circles are still very large and the movements very round. Later on the circular movements become so small that they appear straight. One can see light shining in straight rays, but light principally moves in waves. That indicates that the movements are so subtle that they are no longer visible, and that they appear straight again, or that they do not even surface as a movement. This is the mystical side of Taijiquan.

'Strike with your hands without allowing them to be seen. Once they do become visible, nothing more can be done about it.'

Now we truly have reached a very high level of martial art, meaning the control of the self and the opponent.

...one proceeds from mastering the form to 'invisible' execution.

Level 5 of Taijiquan

The classical texts of Taijiquan say: 'With the gentle flow of energy, with the cosmic energy, one's own internal Qi moves in a natural way...'

Now, suddenly, a completely different union is occurring. Previously only our bodies, our shoulders, the heart/mind, our internal energies were mentioned. At a high level one then speaks of the coordination of internal and external movements; to begin with, only the external coordination, and then even internal and external coordination. But now suddenly other harmonies are occurring; the union with the 'ultimate oneness'. Now an expansive, physical, and spiritual level is reached. Now suddenly there is union with the 'ultimate oneness'. 'With the gentle flow of energy, with the cosmic energy, one's own internal Qi moves in a natural way.' This naturalness does not mean, as we so much like to think, 'I am the way I am' or 'That is what suits me' or 'This is just how I am.' Nature has nothing more to do with personality, with our Ego; but rather with something that lies much deeper behind it, a general naturalness that is inherent within us, the ultimate origin.

'With the gentle flow of energy, with the cosmic energy, one's own internal Qi moves in a natural way.'

There is no longer any separation between us and the cosmos. That is the great achievement.

'Moved by a solid form all the way through to the invisible.'

Solid forms are always in the aspect of being, the impermanent. All that has form is impermanent. All that is, is impermanent. All that is not impermanent, is 'not being'. Not being is the invisible.

'Moved by a solid form all the way through to the invisible.'

Technically this describes the completed transformation of substance and emptiness. Spiritually it denotes the achievement of the direct union of being and eternity, the return of Taiji to Wuji.

'Laozi' ('old master') is regarded as the author of the *Daodejing*, the essential text of Daoism. Daoism and its internal doctrine of energy are the philosophical and energetic foundation of Taijiquan.

And now we have arrived at the first verse of the *Daodejing* by Laozi:

The DAO that can be expressed
is not the eternal DAO.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal name.

'Non-existence' I call the beginning of Heaven and Earth.
'Existence' I call the mother of individual beings.

Therefore does the direction towards non-existence
lead to the sight of the miraculous essence,
the direction towards existence
to the sight of spatial limitations.

Both are one in origin
and different only in name.
In its unity it is called the secret.
The secret's still deeper secret
is the gateway through which all miracles emerge.

*Translated into German by Richard Wilhelm (1910),
thence into English by H.G. Oswald (1985)*

'With the gentle flow of energy, with the cosmic energy, one's own internal Qi moves in a natural way. Moved by a solid form all the way through to the invisible.'

From the metaphysical point of view, this indicates the state of a 'Xian ren', an 'immortal'. This is someone who has broken through the boundaries between being and non-being and has therefore reached immortality.

Level 5 of Taijiquan

'So one realizes how marvellous the natural is.'

In other traditions this comes under the term 'enlightenment'. One recognizes nature. One knows the true nature of things. One recognizes the truth, one recognizes how things are. Technically one has reached a state in which the body, all by itself, purely from its naturalness, can completely adapt and change to any situation. One no longer experiences oneself except as this naturalness, and so realizes nothing but the 'wonderful' – without the slightest effort or exertion.

The movements should by now be flexible and gentle. There should be sufficient internal energy.

Yet no matter how far the student may have advanced, it remains important to keep striving for the best. It is absolutely necessary to work hard day after day to achieve a flexible and adaptable body capable of manifold changes.

It is important to mention at the end, that no matter how far one has come, how good one has become, there are still things to be improved. One should never abandon the training and never stop to strive for the best.

Therefore Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang likes to sign books with the sentence: 'Learning is like swimming against the current. If you stop, you move backwards.'

The body should be fit to change internally and to distinguish between what's essential and what is not. This should be invisible from the outside.

Only then has Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu been reached. In terms of martial skills the hard (gang) should accomplish the soft (rou). The form should be relaxed, dynamic, elastic and lively. Every move and every moment of no emotion is consistent with the principle of Taijiquan.

'Every move and every moment of no emotion' – this describes a state in which only spirit and movement exist. No ego, no thinking, no will: Only spirit and movement, the completion of nature. Spirit

is movement, movement is spirit. There is no longer a difference. Nothing interferes anymore. This is the reason why nobody from the outside can enter into this space, because the attacker still has distance between spirit and movement. Spirit is not pure, the movement is not clear.

There is so much in between spirit and movement: will, thinking, a goal... So the attacker is not able to find a gap, while the master can pick one of the many gaps of his opponent. The attacker has no chance.

Every movement is launched from the entire body without any break. This means that every part of the body should be very sensitive and able to act immediately whenever necessary. This should reach the degree where every part of the body is capable of attacking like a fist whenever in contact with the opponent. The deliberate emission of power and preservation of it should also be constantly alternating. The stance should be firm, as if supported on all sides.

Because the master can now let the essential force out of every part of his body, his whole body is comprised of so-called 'skin fists'. That means he can attack and defend with every body part; thus, also directly in the place in which he is confronted. For the attacker it means the following: Wherever he comes into contact with the master, he already lost. Releasing energy and collecting energy are in balance. This means the master moves without exhausting himself, without effort.

Therefore this level is described as: 'The only person capable of playing with Yin and Yang without being biased by either of the two.' A person holding this degree of skill is considered a good master. A good master will make any movement consistent with the Taiji principle which means that (the actual) movement has become invisible.

In the beginning we are biased. We have a notion of what combat should look like, and which technique to use. I have a notion of what I cannot do yet, but will learn soon. I cannot do it, but I have

a notion of how it should be. Therefore I am biased against Yin and Yang. But here, at the highest level, in completed naturalness, I am standing back. I surrender to nature and act in its spontaneity. There is nobody left to have a notion of how something should be. Therefore it is 'The only person capable of playing with Yin and Yang without being biased by either of the two.'

The (actual) movement has become invisible. Because it is in complete harmony with the Taiji principle, it means that there is no longer any movement that is not in itself pure flowing. It is the friction, the angularity of a movement that appears to us as an attack. This makes it 'visible'. The tension and aggression within a directed attack signals to our nervous system that there is a threat, and we react towards it. Pressure creates counter-pressure. No pressure, no counter-pressure. Therefore such a movement appears to us as invisible. Not because we cannot see it, but because there is nothing in our bodies that gets activated by such a movement. There is nothing that reacts to this movement. The mind is also not able to assess the situation correctly and take measures. So this complete movement is 'invisible' to us and we are defenceless and completely at its mercy. Defenceless not only because we cannot counter it with any of our own movements. Defenceless also because we cannot do anything within ourselves to reduce its effect on us. We cannot use our internal shield. We cannot use anything. It is a fatal situation for us; and absolute effortlessness for the master.

Having brought Level 5 of Taiji-Gong Fu to perfection means that a strong connection and coordination between the spirit, the contraction and relaxation of the muscles, their movements, and the functions of the internal organs has been established, one that will not be constricted or derailed even by a sudden and strong attack. Instead we remain flexible and agile.

The goal of all efforts: Whatever problem reveals itself to us, we stay 'flexible and agile'. Problems become challenges. The problem disappears, only the challenge is left. The challenge becomes pure

and free action. Because body and spirit are pure and free. No problem, no suffering. Happiness results.

However, even when we have reached this point, we should keep training continuously in order to reach new levels further beyond. Science aims beyond given limits. So does the science of Taijiquan: a whole lifetime is not enough to realize in entirety all the beauty and the power of Taijiquan.

The way has become the goal. Whatever I have achieved, and even if it was the absolute last and highest: I continue on the path, walk it further and further. All has become the way, all is the goal: The way is the goal, and it was never any different.



Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang and his son Chen Yingjun

The Authors

GRANDMASTER CHEN XIAOWANG

Born in 1946 in Chenjiagou, China, he is the direct descendant, in the nineteenth generation, of the Taijiquan founder family of Chen, and the world's official chief representative and heir of the Taijiquan tradition. Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang, among many other distinctions, is an official 'National Treasure' of China. He conducts seminars all year round, all over the world. Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang is considered a living legend. His concern is not only the global spread of Taijiquan, but the preservation of the authentic teachings. In 1994, together with Jan Silberstorff, he founded the WCTA (World Chen Xiaowang Taijiquan Association) which is the largest Chen-style Taijiquan organization in the world. Within the last decade, he has also become known worldwide as a leading master of calligraphy.

MASTER JAN SILBERSTORFF

Jan Silberstorff received his official Taijiquan training license from the People's Republic of China in 1989, permitting him to become an official teacher of Taijiquan in China. In 1993 he became the first Western medalist in the official tournament at Chenjiagou, the birthplace of Taijiquan. Jan became the first Western indoor student and family disciple of Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang in 1993 and now teaches as a 20th generation successor of Chen family. Together they founded the Chen Xiaowang World Taijiquan Association with Jan heading the German section, the largest organisation of its kind.

Jan is fluent in Chinese, having lived in China for many years. In 1998 he was invited to be the first Westerner to perform at the official Singapore State Wushu Master's Event, which was broadcast all over Asia. From the International Wushu Federation

of the People's Republic of China he was awarded the highest duan grade in Grand Master Chen Xiaowang's Western Taijiquan community.

In 2008 he founded the Taijiquan associations WCTA-Brazil and WCTA-Chile. In 2009 he founded the charity organization WCTAG-hilft e.V., which cares for children in need in Sri Lanka and Brazil.

Jan has published many articles, four books, several DVDs, and has produced two TV series about Taijiquan. Jan currently teaches in 15 countries around the world and lives in Brazil.

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*The authors, Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang and
Master Jan Silberstorff*